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FAR AWAY;

OR,

SKETCHES OF SCENERY AND SOCIETY

IN

MAURITIUS.

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ac.

BY

CHARLES JOHN BOYLE.

Chacun voit avec des yeux différents. Mes impressions sont à moi. Je ne donne que celles-là.—LA DUCHESSE D'ABRANTES.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
1867.

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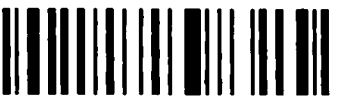
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JOHN [illegible] AND SON, [illegible]

TO SHOLTO DOUGLAS, ESQ.

My dear Sholto,

Without having asked your permission I dedicate my book to you and your good wife.

Many of the letters, which, in fact, were its original shape, were written home from under your hospitable roof. Will you and Mrs Douglas accept them, in their present form, as some acknowledgment, however faint, of the affection I bear you, and of my gratitude for the unremitting kindness and pleasant companionship, which so powerfully contributed towards rendering my year of *widowerhood* far less one of probation than, under other circumstances, it possibly could have been?

Yours,

My dear Sholto,

Very affectionately,

Charles J. Boyle.

August, 1867.

A WORD AT STARTING.

My book pretends to be nothing more than what I call it on the title-page—*Sketches*.

Although not the identical letters, which, during a three years' residence in Mauritius, I was in the habit of writing home, the following pages contain, more or less, the substance of them. In a different form and order they made up my 'monthly packet, so that my impressions of all I saw were on their passage to my 'far away' correspondents, almost as soon as I had myself received them.

The better I become acquainted with the world, the more I see of its scenery and society,

the more implicitly do I believe in first impressions.

It would be an untruth to assert I was sorry to leave Mauritius. 'Ad ogni uccello,' the Italians tell us, 'suo nido è bello,' but how doubly so, when the old bird has been long upon the wing, and the young brood perched upon the branches of the dear old familiar tree, anxiously looking out for his return.

Nevertheless to be honest, as I turned my face, for the last time, to the fast-fading outline of those purple peaks, which told me 'Maurice' was still there, my eyes blinked with something very like a tear. True I was returning to all I love best on earth; but the echo of no mere passing words of affection were still in my ears—the 'good-bye' had been said, the parting squeeze of the hand had been given; yet I was bearing away with me memories of much friendly intercourse henceforth to be broken up, and of many pleasant hours never to come back; nay, more, I was leaving behind me some, into whose kind

faces, according to all human probability, I could never look again. I almost thought then, I had better never have known them, better if I had never had the good luck to set foot on the hospitable shores of their lovely, sunny, sea-girt home.

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FAR AWAY;

OR SKETCHES OF SCENERY AND SOCIETY IN MAURITIUS.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW HOME.

It will be long before I forget the morning A. and I set foot on the classic shores of 'Paul and Virginia.' Despair is a strong word, but I know no better to express, properly, what we both felt on being ushered into our apartment—the best we were assured, and I have lived long enough here already to believe it—in the 'Grand Hotel de l'Europe,' of Port Louis. We had sighted the island at daybreak. We might, and we did, heartily congratulate ourselves on being at last on the point of quitting the nutshell into which two kernels had been so long squeezed, and in which, since we had left Suez, we, the two kernels aforesaid, had well nigh done nothing else but liquify night and day. Captain ——, to the last obliging, had offered to send us ashore in his own boat with an officer of the ship for our cice-

roné. We landed early, and I will describe, as well as I can, into what. Heat, dust, dirt; smells intolerable, clamour indescribable; screeching mules by the hundreds, all biting one another, all kicking everything they could kick, with sweating, bellowing Malabars* incessantly belabouring them. Whew! there goes a pair of hind legs bang up into the air! there follows a whack from a bamboo!—such a whack, such a bamboo!—and down again come those two legs quivering. Then there were carts, going and coming, which required you to cast your eyes as quickly as you could before and behind,—one should have been provided with a pair out of a chameleon's head for the occasion, so as to have been able to look both ways at once. If nothing ran up against you, you were next to certain to run up against something, even if, while your eyes were occupied, your feet did not stumble over piles and piles of fat sugar-bags heaped up on every side, for the 'coupe' † was now in full swing, or, more strictly speaking, it was the moment for shipping the sugar.

Oh what a hubbub! what discordant sounds from men and brutes, perhaps the latter term would do as well for both here. What unceasing turmoil and confusion! Every hue of skin and

* The common appellation given here to the whole Indian population.

shade of every hue. Black men, brown men, whity-brown men—all of them streaming with perspiration; some loading, some unloading; each gang performing its work, as it were, mechanically, to the accompaniment of a shrill, low, monotonous chant, which the one half of these all but stark naked labourers caught up in admirable time as the other half let it drop—four or five notes four or five times repeated over and over again: more than this that hymn of reeking labour seemed to me never to vary that morning, or on any other I chanced to be on the quay.

How even now, as I copy out from an old letter, it rings in my ears still! It was, I may say, the first utterly strange sound I heard in Mauritius,* and as such it will ever be specially connected with it. Nothing, I think, recalls the past as vividly as sounds. I have left the place never to go back, but my ear is like the rare shell in its cotton shroud and glass case; that plaintive sound is retained — plaintive it seemed to me, and its echo lingers with me still.

Almost the first object you encounter, on landing on the quay of Port Louis, is the bronze statue of 'La Bourdonnais,' of which and of whom in a future letter.

"That is the statue of La Bourdonnais," ob-

* Not *the* Mauritius, as you ladies 'of England who live at home at ease' persist in calling it.

served our good-natured guide, "who figures, you know—"

"Oh, yes, I have just read Paul and Virginia again,"—feeling I was in for an epitome of what I knew by heart, while standing under that red-hot sun, and before that nearly red-hot bronze figure. As it was, I already wished La Bourdonnais, statue and all, and Paul and Virginia too, at the bottom of the sea we had just come off, forgetting, at the moment, the poor young lady had been there already.

Well! on we walked, and reached the Hotel at last. We passed through a wide gate-way, crossed an untidily-kept, half-planted court and along a broad verandah crowded with parties of coffee-complexioned young gentlemen sitting and sprawling about in attitudes more easy than graceful. They were sipping all sorts of liquids, transparent and opaque, from very large glasses, and alternately puffed out clouds of tobacco and stared most unceremoniously at the new arrivals.

In a minute more we found ourselves 'au 1er;' and with an air as if we were about to be ushered into the best apartment of the 'Grand Hotel' *par excellence*, a door was dashed open, and in we walked.

'Is this your best apartment?' I said almost meekly, standing aghast. The idea flashed across me we were treated shabbily in accordance with our appearance. We had landed with the in-

tention of dressing comfortably on shore. A. was rumpled, and I unshaven.

"'Monsieur peut choisir,' quietly replied the shoeless, stockingless, wool-headed waiter, showing his magnificent teeth from between his thick lips. Then whisking over his shoulder a napkin scarcely whiter than his skin, not darker than his shirt—jacket he had none—he opened a door on the opposite side of the passage. I followed him, looked through the open door, and was quickly back into the first room. Sambo grinned—they always do grin, especially when it is most aggravating they should. The dirty state of this apartment was—no, not better—less bad than the extra filthiness of the other. A. threw up her eyes despairingly; she was gasping for fresh air. It was intensely hot without, and as close within, with the peculiar smell in addition of a room shut up too long. Spasmodically rushing to the great big window she called to me to help her open it. It was cob-webbed, and apparently had been, for some days past, the tomb of several generations of very strange-looking, long-legged, lanky insects; or perhaps it were a better description to call it the larder of an excellent illustration of a 'bloated aristocrat' in the shape of a huge brown spider all over golden spots, who seemed to be drowsily counting the numerous items of future banquets hung up all round him by their heads and their heels. A. gave a faint

shriek, and bang went up the window: the aristocrat scuffled off in a very undignified hurry, the larder was rent asunder, and the stock of provisions disappeared in a trice.

I thrust my head out of window. How the scene before me told me at a glance we were indeed 'far away,' in a strange land, in a new home! There was a court, and a tall tree stretched out its crooked limbs over three parts of it; the leaves were so broad that the shadows which it cast in chequered patches were intensely dark and large. Some scantily-dressed children, their single garment, once white, all torn and untied, stood half asleep, or lay about. There was a gorged duck or two, and some feverish-looking fowls, their feathers half off, and those on all ruffled. Here dozed a cat with her tail encircling her, and two mangy dogs, stretched at their full length, were at her side. They were all huddled up under the branches of the tree. It was too hot to snarl and fight; yet the tongues of the women went apace—a contrast of activity to their languid listless way of moving about. The tree was laden with enormous clusters of a brilliant flower, to me unknown. The shadows cast upon the ground were so still one might have imagined them painted on it. Nature, true *to* herself, did her utmost to embellish, and was lovely *in* herself. But the scene beneath that tree! It is sufficient to say it was a Creole kitchen, Creole scullions

cleaning fish and plucking poultry. We quickly turned our eyes again inward, the least sickening sight of the two, in spite of the unwashed floor, a tumbled bed calling itself made, tattered mosquito curtains, and a solitary bandy-legged table with what looked like plague-spots all over it. Such was the room, which, for all we knew at that instant, was to be our preliminary home for some weeks. I am bound to say that, since this, the 'Grand Hotel de l'Europe' has changed hands. I have never entered it since, and have never wished, but I have been repeatedly told it is better; and I can imagine that far easier than that it should be worse.

I think I can hear —— exclaiming, "Poor solus." Hold! In three hours more we did not deserve any pity. We were under a hospitable roof, in a clean room, breathing country air, feasting our eyes on a lovely view, and meeting with a reception that smacked rather of many years' acquaintance than of an utterly new and, by us, unexpected one.

Well, here is all I can say to-day. To-morrow the mail sails. I will get up early and finish my sketch. Early rising is no penance here—the first hours of day are the most delicious of the twenty-four.

Well! to go on! It may be imagined how I longed to look about me in the morning;

how eagerly I thrust my head out of my window to stare, at my ease, over all near me. When I did, however, the strangeness and novelty, to the degree I expected, did not seem to be there. The general aspect scarcely induced me to fancy myself so 'far away'—not, assuredly, to believe the real fact that I was for the first time in my life resident in a tropical country. The reality of the great difference comes on one by degrees, as one gets to scrutinize the details of the landscape. It is far more apparent, I am told, in the interior of the island. Of this I hope soon to be a judge. It is there, I hear, that one perceives oneself at once to be surrounded by a vegetation utterly dissimilar from the one left behind in the fatherland. To be sure, as I stood by the window of my dressing-room, a cluster of white blossoms waved to and fro in my face from the end of a long branch, and on examining it closer it proved to be stephanotis. And coming along the road yesterday, I had glimpses of cocoa trees, with their drooping branches waving over their huge bunches of nuts; but as yet these were the exceptions to the rule.

The most startling sight, perhaps, on landing in Mauritius, for anybody at least who has not been in India, is the dress, always excepting the *un*-dress, of the Malabars. Nine groups you see out of ten are composed of these picturesque people. They have a marvellous eye for colour,

and somehow there is harmony in any two or three they choose to put together. Probably the swarthy polished skin so freely exposed to view has something to do with this. But a good effect is produced by mixtures we Europeans should never venture on. Two or three of these men and women, with their plump little children, squatting and chattering under a tamarind or mango tree, form groups I myself especially delight in, and would quickly transfer to a leaf in a sketch-book, if I could.

I was but little prepared for the amount of life and bustle one finds oneself in the midst of on first landing. I do not only mean of the kind I have already described. There are few towns, I imagine, of the sort in any part of the world, in proportion to the size, with a greater number of carriages of one sort or another in daily circulation.* The fact is, that a conveyance on wheels of some kind is here no luxury, but a necessity. Most people that can, if not all the year round, some portion of it, live out of town, and come into it early of a morning for the performance of daily office work. Some distant planters are the exception to this in-and-out-of-town life, together

* In 1865 there were upwards of 1300 carriages declared, and which paid the tax. Evasions of this and every other tax are numerous. There was about the same return of 'carioles'—the 'cabs' of Mauritius—of nearly 3000 carriage and saddle horses. The population of Port Louis was about 78,000.

with their women-kind: the love of gadding is not, I take it, as yet one of the small sins Creole ladies have to make clean breasts of in the Confessional.

The town of Port Louis rises prettily in the form of an amphitheatre, at the base of a low range of mountains green to their very tips. A more fantastic collection of peaks, and ridges, and slopes, it would be difficult to imagine. Their volcanic origin is palpable at the first glance. The houses are shut out from the street by walls or iron railings, and over these some bright-coloured creeper is sure to be clustering unrebuked, or running up and along the roofs high or low. These roofs, at the first glance of a stranger's eye, have the appearance of being tiled; but are covered with the 'bardeau,' a kind of shingle of a dark reddish-coloured wood. A broad verandah almost invariably runs round one or two sides of the house, if not on all four; and here, during the great heat of the day, large blinds of various sorts of grass matting, or canvas, or a diminutive bamboo, are let down, and effectually keep out the glare of the flaming sun. In the evening they are raised in front, and generally display a family group languidly sunk down in deep cane arm-chairs. Some of these over-easy seats have exceedingly broad arms running out to a disproportionate length, which struck me, when I first saw them, as very awkward-looking bits of furniture.

I soon learnt both to value and make use of them, a use, I need scarcely observe, reserved for the male sex. The legs of a gentleman so seated are stretched out full length, and repose along the chair's broad arms; and, if he be really comfortable, the chair being exceedingly concave, the tips of his feet and his knees rise much above his head. Stand exactly opposite and look at him straight, and two lines of rail running down an inclined plane to a given point—his nose, give no bad idea of one of the many easy, indolent attitudes *we* Mauritians decidedly delight in.

If company be expected, the female portion of the group, at any rate, is exceedingly well 'got up;' but if no visit be anticipated, very loose and often not very fresh-looking garments, defying both 'corset' and 'cage,' predominate.

Palms of many kinds and other trees stare, or peep, or hang over into the street. At the time I am writing, the 'Bois noir,'* an acacia introduced originally from India, and very common now throughout the island, is in full flower. It is one, I find, of a very limited number of trees, to be seen at any time of the year in Mauritius, quite bare of leaves. When I say it is in full flower, I ought equally to say it is in full seed; for the seed of the former *blow* is still hanging

* Acacia odoratissima, I believe.

thickly on almost every branch, in the shape of enormous metallic-looking pods. They are quite dried up, and of a yellow that glistens like gold in the sun, and when slightly agitated by the wind they almost clink. The flower is a brush-like, greenish-white tuft, not very large, and would be nothing out of the common but for the profusion of it with which the tree is loaded. It is positively *snowed* with blossoms, while, in addition, the perfume is quite exquisite. Taken altogether with its dense masses of flower, its fragrance, and its glittering pendant pods, the tree is remarkable, and struck me much the first day I saw it. It is in Mauritius, in fact, very much what the lilac is to us in an English spring—the spring left out; we have none, nor winter either; summer is always with us. Here, really, as Titania tells us, "the mazed world knows not which is which."

The houses for the most part are wooden. By a late municipal regulation, however, if you build in the town, stone is indispensable; his Worship the Mayor having, it seems, *ex officio* the feelings of a burnt child, and dreading fire. The kitchen, *à propos* of fire, for generally speaking it is the only one spot where there is one, is almost invariably detached, as are the rooms for strangers and the household servants. The last arrangement, in my opinion, is a most advantageous one, judging from the

general appearance of their untidy and dirty habits, if negroes, and of their offensive dissimilarity, in one respect, to the flower of the 'Bois noir.' According to the number of these separate 'pavilions' a house is reckoned a large or a small one. When to the rest of my description I add that, on paying a visit, you with rare exception at once plunge 'in medias res,' walking slap into the salon from the verandah, and that the half-glazed windows, the upper half consisting of 'jalousies,' perform the part of doors as well, I shall have given, I hope, a tolerable idea of a Mauritian dwelling of the higher class in town and country. Of interiors anon. There is often, when the blinds are down, a very bird-cage look about them.

The eye does not take long in familiarizing itself with novelty, and these Creole houses are already losing the look of strangeness they had in mine the day I landed. My first impression was of something unsolid and unreal, and more like portions of a scene on the stage than *bonâ fide* dwellings of living human beings.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW POPULATION.

HAVING attempted to give some idea of the houses and streets of Port Louis, I want now to set before you, reader, as vividly as I can, some of the animate and inanimate objects you meet in and about them. Motley is scarcely more the word in dress than in complexion. You can have no idea how striking and varied a feature of life in Port Louis is its population. You have natives from every part of the vast continent of India, all differing not less in feature than in form. Weedy and athletic men, imperial looking, by far the rarest of the two; and miserable, insignificant women. They are of all hues and shades. In the course of half an hour's walk, you stumble on Parsees, Arabs, Cingalese, Chinamen, Lascars, Malays, Mosambiques, and Malgâches (natives of Madagascar). Add to these the negro, the mulatto, the French Creole, the English Creole; nor do I throw in all the other Europeans. Picture to yourself the confusion of tongues and diversity of costume of all this small Babel. Nothing can

be more diverting to the eye, at least to mine, than a drive or stroll through the most frequented thoroughfares of Port Louis. I never tire of it, and I find myself for ever staring quite as much as I did the first day, and longing more and more for such a gifted pencil as ——'s. But just come with me into the Bazaar. Here, in a concentrated group, I can bring them almost all before you at once.

It is early. The morning is still tolerably cool. There are men of all sorts, properly clothed and improperly, at least so one continues to consider the last for a week or two. They are sauntering about smoking, alone, or chattering together. Some are solemn, some exceedingly merry. Some, like clockwork dolls, just roll their eyes from right to left and back on the passers-by, and then on the goods they would tempt you to purchase, while some point at them vehemently, gesticulating as if the conviction of their cheapness of the commodity comes necessarily from the finger-tips. There are several Creole ladies, both bedizened and dowdy, seeking their day's provisions of fruit and vegetables. Verily, there is a choice wherewith to fill those quaint bamboo baskets hanging from their own arms or, oftener, from that of a black maid, who lazily follows, barefooted or slipshod, close at her mistress' heels. This latter damsel is usually dressed entirely in black, unless the kerchief on the head be, for a change, white

or of a bright colour. It is oftenest of black silk, folded on the temples, and knotted after the fashion once common in provincial French towns, and which a few years back you still occasionally saw in London streets, when you listened to poor sentimental Queen Hortense's 'Partant pour la Syrie,' that famous air, *of late revived*, with an almost invariable cracked harp accompaniment. One of these Creole ladies may be attended by an Indian boy or 'chokerer,' who, if 'Grand Madame' * be, by great chance, very particular about his personal appearance, is dressed in snowy white, without a spec upon him from his glossy head to his small feet, the latter bare, the Oriental mark of respect of servants to their betters. This dark-eyed youth has bound a crimson sash round his slim waist, and wears on his head either a turban or small cap, in shape like a melon that has been sliced in two and hollowed out. It is jauntily set on, the point pulled down towards the nose coquettishly, and worn cocked-hat fashion. These head-dresses denote the presidency whence the emigrant. Bombay or Madras claims the turban; the half-melon is the badge of Calcutta. They are sometimes of a coarse bright-coloured cloth, sky-blue, orange, red, or apple-green, and covered with embroidery of gold or silver. But the smartest servants have

* The usual appellation of the mistress of a Creole household.

it in white linen, starched, with or without a coloured hem. These, with the flowing, well-oiled, carefully-combed hair underneath, have a very good effect.

The Bazaar is a large square, shut in at each end by iron railings, and broad gates opening into parallel streets. A road wide enough for a carriage, though little else but a chance cart, I imagine, is ever seen to enter, runs down the middle, the open sky overhead, and the road cutting the Bazaar into two equal parts. On each side are spacious pavements for the display of the various marketable productions. They are roofed over and have a passage down the centre, so that as you walk from end to end you can look on either side and see almost at a glance everything that is spread out to tempt you. All over these stone floors, before their respective heaps of vegetables and fruits and flowers, of which some are tumbling over out of the brimful baskets, some piled up on the ground, you see squatted little parties of Indian women. Numberless plump, small, stark naked urchins of both sexes are running and frisking about, or sprawling and playing at their mothers' sides. They look like so many pieces of dark polished marble, or still more like the little chocolate figures in the bonbons shops on the Paris Boulevards. These market women are, with few exceptions, very handsomely dressed, and evidently the

Bazaar is held to be worth the pains of a little daily coquetry. Fresh buds and leaves are often twisted into their black silken shining hair, along with a profusion of gold or silver ornaments. The ear and nose are loaded with rings. In the nose one rarely sees more than one, but often large enough to fall below the lips, and so far convenient, as it is possible to eat through it. Sometimes, instead of this, there is a flat piece of metal, cunningly worked and richly ornamented, which falls just on the lips. It puts me in mind of those pieces of white porcelain which flap over the mouths of the letter pillars in London. This in their estimation may be a very coquettish fashion, but it must be somewhat inconvenient. In a single ear I have counted as many as five rings of different shapes, while in the other you may see but one. Indians do not consider such a want of conformity in bad taste, and I rather agree with them. These ear-rings are generally set with roughly cut emeralds or rubies, or pearls, but they are seldom of any size. Look at that woman before yonder pile of red and yellow fruits and huge, broad, odd-shaped leaves, which have the appearance of being varnished, they are so glossy. Her round plump shoulders are quite bare. A bright apple-green muslin drapery with a crimson or lilac border is drawn across her full and scarcely concealed bosom. With this she wears a tight-fitting silk jacket

of some dark rich colour. A mass of deep orange folds of a thicker material twines about her legs, which, however, are left sufficiently uncovered to display the anklets and numberless toe rings. She holds up part of a banana leaf with three or four different sorts of mangoes thrown together upon it; some of an empurpled dark green, some of a deep rose colour shot with amber, some oval, some long, some curved at the end. The woman looks up at you rather shyly with her large round oriental eye, darkly stained and fringed with its up-curling lash. The cross divisions of her hair between the roots are bedaubed with a blood-coloured sort of paste. A round spot of the same about as big as an official wafer is on her forehead, and the inside of her mouth is nearly as red with the juice of the betel nut she is chewing. Sometimes the paint descends in a straight line to the very tip of the nose. Such is their idea of what is becoming—but is it more barbarous than many a fashion of our own? Her arms are tattooed and loaded with broad circles of gold or silver crowded together between the shoulder and elbow, and again from the wrists upwards nearly to meet the others. These women often look as if they were half in armour. As a variety, knobs of one or the other metal dangle from thongs of leather; and the throat is encircled by a plain collar, not unlike an English

dog's, but of the above-named more costly material; or there is a row of large golden or silver coins, sovereigns, or rupees, or some piece of money or other, with a small wire or crimson thread run through them. Now and then one sees a face as remarkable for beauty and regularity of feature as the costume is for its richness, but as a rule you do not meet with many handsome Indian women. Ninety-nine out of a hundred are prematurely old, worn, wrinkled, toothless, haggard. In like proportion one's eye scarcely ever falls on an ugly Indian child, or very young girl, although I might use the word child still. They often marry, if marrying it can be called, poor things, as early as ten years old. They are even betrothed at five or six, for the sake of the fee graspingly exacted by the parents, and the chance of evading one engagement and afterwards contracting another which, if dextrously negotiated, brings in a second fee. Thus completely are the daughters of the family looked upon as objects for barter. But the small children! they are the drollest, fattest, brightest-eyed little beings you can possibly imagine; and when they skip and laugh, grin at you with their exquisitely white and even teeth, and shake down their long soft hair all over their plump, naked, diminutive bodies, they really are very pretty. Happy for these merry children if

children they remained! It is difficult to trace a single one of these pleasant features on those of the sad-looking drudges of after all not a much later age.

* * * *

I shall have occasion to speak of the various kinds of fruits and vegetables when I take a stroll in the country. In the Bazaar they form a pretty picture spread out on the great green leaves, piled up with much taste, and last, not least, set off by the costumes of the vendors. The fish and meat Bazaar is a few yards off. I looked in at it once, passing from the perfume of fruits and flowers into smells decidedly less agreeable, so once was enough. Of the fish however there is much to say. They too may verily be called flowers and fruit in these seas, so exquisitely beautiful and so varied are their colours. But I shall prefer describing them in connection with their own element. At one end of the Bazaar there was, till quite lately, a small passage, or alley, with booths on either side; and here Arab shopkeepers plied a brisk trade—selling the smaller articles of dress, cutlery, and perfumery. On my last visit paid to the Bazaar I found the Arabs gone. Along side these stretched, and does still, the portion appointed for the sale of all dry materials of consumption; preserved fruits, curry balls, seeds of

all sorts, split peas, lentiles, dates, cocoa nuts, and such like; and out of the middle rise up large cages filled with native and other birds. Outside, on the top, are generally perched cockatoos or parrots; and within, stupid little love birds huddled up together in a row. Brown, red-beaked, spotted, living specks dart to and fro from perch to perch, and pre-eminently the cardinal of Mauritius—not the grey red-crested creature familiar to us in English cages, but a smaller bird, of a more graceful form, and at one time of year almost entirely of a brilliant scarlet. This beautiful bird is common enough, as I shall have to tell you. The female bird, unlike most of its sex in a higher scale of nature, is content to be always sombrely and decently clad; but when the cock has his summer suit on—in winter he borrows his wife's—and wings his way rapidly across the sky, the glare of the sun falls upon his fire-coloured plumage and he almost flashes as he flies.

I have mentioned the Chinamen as part of the varied population. They are very numerous, and daily increasing, and are an active, busy, thrifty race; you find them in every out-of-the-way nook and corner of the island, wherever there are two or three houses, or an Indian camp,* you are quite sure to come forthwith upon a Chinaman's shop. The shops themselves are small,

* The assemblage of huts in which the Indians live on an estate is called the camp.

but very handily situated for traffic—a *sine quâ non*, for instance, where three or four roads meet.

They are crowded with all sorts of things to eat, and still more amply stocked with drinkables. Then there are dangling tapes and ribbons, hung up over the door, threads, pins and needles, shoes, and straw hats; in short, it is another edition of

> 'The well-stocked village shop,
> Selling butter, soap, and treacle,
> Beeswax, whipcord, lollipop.'

Across the counter are for ever to be seen, grinning from ear to ear, two or three fat, round, sensual-looking, pig's-eyed faces with long plaited tails of hair brought in circles round the forehead and confined with a small comb. The owners of them are generally neatly dressed, in cotton jackets and immensely broad loose trousers. When walking on the roads, these Chinamen are very fond of European shoes and of very big umbrellas. They seem, too, tolerably clean, more than can be said of their Creole neighbours; but to my mind they are one of the most repulsive-featured people in the world. They often marry Creoles, become Roman Catholics, and being almost always wealthy after a few years' residence in Mauritius, they are considered great catches by the young ladies of the class they marry into. One of them lately confessed to clearing upwards of £1300 per annum by the monopolized trade of five of these small shops. They have one invete-

rate vice, that of opium smoking, and they are very often great gamblers. I heard of one instance of a Chinaman staking his whole shop on a single throw, himself included, for a term, to serve in it, without wages.

As to shops in general, they are far better interiorly than you would imagine from their outsides. Many in Port Louis are exceedingly good, among which the rival establishments of the 'Flore Mauricienne' and 'La Reine des Fleurs' are pre-eminent. The bonbons, pâtisserie, and other good things to be had in either, would not disgrace Paris. In the French shops, as far as my experience goes, civility is invariable. Nay, more, the people in them are not only civil, they are extremely obliging. I cannot say the same of the few English shops I have occasionally entered. Here the 'ladies,' with an occasional exception, strike me as aiming more at patronizing condescension when they ask double what a thing is worth, and that, to say the least, is offensive. This remark, however, does not extend to Mrs ——, who does not even patronize, but serves you as one might imagine a she-bear would, keeping a stall at the North Pole.

Many shops preserve a custom, now almost extinct in Europe, of hanging out signs at the door. There is the 'Bon Diable,' a very bon Diable, and there is the 'Canon Vert' and the 'Prophête,' an excellent shop and most obliging people; and

a host of others. I passed by a barber's one day by chance, in a by-street, and my eyes fell on a French version of an advertisement current in England, if I remember, in the time of Charles II., perhaps then imported from France, and if so, this may be the original production of the poet's brain—

Plaignez le triste sort
D'Absolom pendu par la nuque
Qui aurait evité la mort,
S'il eut porté perruque.

O Absolom, my son, my son,
O Absolom, my son,
If thou hadst worn a periwig,
Thou hadst not been undone!

This appeal to the Mauritian world's pity is surmounted by an oil painting, as persuasive, it is to be hoped, as the stanza is plaintive. It represents the ill-fated son and heir of David in the above sad but poetically described predicament. I wondered as I stood before it that the exuberance of his hair had not been made the vehicle of a puff for Macassar oil. It could well be so. The curls are painted with pre-Raphaelite conscientiousness—but spite of this it is not a work of the highest art, although not really very much inferior to the portraits you see in the principal houses here, by the great living artist M——.

I ought to add that the small shops I have spoken of as the source of such rapidly-made

fortunes were, a few years ago, exclusively kept by Creoles. The Indians came and turned these native traders out, and they in turn are now giving way to the Chinamen. Many of these enriched Indians have gone back to spend their gains in their own country. Some, however, remain in this land of their former adoption, have become small landed proprietors, give their children a European education, and in the persons of sons or grandsons are doubtless destined some day to play a prominent part in Creole politics; but of such matters later. According to a saying attributed to a former Governor of Mauritius, the Indians arrive in it monkeys and leave it men.

Of the names written over some of these small shops many read funnily. Here is one for you. Monsieur—all superscriptions denote the sex of the shopkeeper — Sooloogaar-goo-sinni vaassaagân; rather extravagant, it strikes me, in his o's and a's, neighbour Sooloogaar-goo-sinni vaassaagon! Here is the laconic style, with a hankering after vowels too, Mr Fee-too. Perhaps they are not mere names—I know not; but the first reminds one of the Queen of Madagascar's title of honour, O Rabodonandianampoinimerina, which almost requires to have come out in parts, like the picture of the sea-serpent in *Punch*—one half of which came out one week with the head, the other with the tail the next.

CHAPTER III.

THE LAND WE LIVE IN.

A STORY is told of a lady who persisted in placing Mauritius in the West Indian Islands, merely because the gentleman she was conversing with, a native of the place, talked of his sugar canes. Sugar, we may conclude, and the West Indies were as inseparably associated with each other in the good woman's mind as roast pigs were with babies in Mrs Nickleby's. And yet I dare say a good many other ladies—no insinuations—would be puzzled, if suddenly called upon to put down their finger exactly where it lies on the map. As I am going to give a brief sketch of its history, I had best start with its whereabouts. For the edification, then, of all ladies let me at once state that we, the children of Mauritius, slumber in a cradle rocked by the waves of the Indian Ocean, just within the tropics. The cradle, probably of volcanic formation, is shaped like a pear. Its greatest length is 39 miles, its greatest breadth about 33; south latitude 20, east longitude 57. Some-

where about 700 square miles form the area, so that, in fact, it is not much bigger than several of our English counties. Those who come and see us, and choose to do so *viâ* the Cape of Good Hope, have to traverse upwards of 11,000 miles. If by the Mediterranean, the overland route, and Aden, about 7000. I may then with reason, I think, say that we are 'far away.'

Mauritius was discovered by the Portuguese under Don Pedro de Mascaregnhas, quite at the beginning of the 16th century. Don Pedro is reported to have named it 'Itha do Cernos,' Island of Swans; if so, the Don's swans, like many other people's, were geese, for the feathered creature which suggested the name to Don Pedro, peculiar, it is believed, to this part of the world, which the French have called 'Dronte' and we 'Dodo,' was, according to the well-known portrait of one, far more like the cackling bird than the graceful favourite of Leda. From Cenos came 'cerné,' the appellation the island long bore, the sole vestiges of which are, I fancy, a country-house a little way out of Port Louis, and the 'Cernéen' newspaper, which, being professedly anti-English, has probably thought fit to go as far back from British thraldom as it can for a name, and to boot never loses half an opportunity of 'pitching into' 'perfide Albion.'

Don Pedro, so says tradition, finding no living

man to oppose his landing—nothing, in short, but clumsy, fat, stupid dodos, which suffered themselves to be approached and knocked on the head, as if they liked it—thought it advisable to have an eye to the future, and to stock the island against any after visit. Accordingly, he left behind him a number of deer, goats, pigs, and monkeys: why the last, he probably best knew himself, as also how he came to have enough on board to spare them. But considering those days of uncertain navigation, he must have been tolerably well off for provisions. The creatures so landed, fraternized, we must suppose, with the dodos, who did the honours of their own country to them so well, that they settled to remain, and so increased and multiplied. All four are still found in a wild state throughout the island. Apparently Don Pedro had no snakes, or none that he could just then do without, the reptile being here utterly unknown,—a boon we share with the inhabitants of Malta, thanks to Saint Paul, and of Ireland, thanks to Saint Patrick, having ourselves to be equally grateful to Don Pedro, whether saint or sinner. I take a jump now, or the chances are my reader will take one for himself, and so get at once to the end of my letter. Let him brush up his 'Universal History,' at the chapter on Dutch ascendancy over Portuguese in these seas. Up to 1710, the Dutch were lords and masters.

The date at which they established themselves firmly is doubtful, probably the middle of the 17th century. They imported slaves from Madagascar and the coasts of Africa, who eventually, *en revanche*, *ex*ported them, calling in to their assistance, so tradition informs us, a very formidable ally, the rats, as shall be told later. A period of unrecorded barbarism and darkness followed the utter abandonment of the place by the Dutch, most of whom settled afresh in the colony of the Cape of Good Hope. The Maroon slaves, becoming complete masters of the island, murdered the crews of all ships that touched here, and whose captains, lured by the beauty of the place, landed. Thus for one or two years they remained undisturbed in their lawless possession. The descendants of these formerly imported slaves are undoubtedly the real 'Noblesse Campagnarde' —the 'pur sang'—of the country, and have a right to consider all later settlers as interlopers. Reader, if you like to know more of their after-history, get 'Creoles and Coolies.' In this book will be found many histories connected with their long and cruel persecution, that are darker even than its victims' skins. They are related, I may add, by the author with the usual gusto and in the genuine lachrymose style of Exeter Hall. Some authors do really seem to relish their horrors.

But to come back from digression. In 1715,

this 'most eligible residence' was again 'to be let.' A party of adventurers from the sister island Bourbon—this last had been in the hands of the French for half a century—set out one fine morning and came across the intervening 80 miles. They tore down 'the bill,' and took literally *French leave* to remain. In six years, the French East India Company were regularly established, to whom our repeated successes in this quarter of the world, especially at the time of Lord Clive's marvellous career, were eventually the cause of frequent and great anxiety. From this, in time, the Crown relieved them, assuming the government of the island. Bourbon, by the process of Imperial tabooing now called Réunion, and the Isle de France—for which, to ignore French dominion as much as possible, we, when we took it, resuscitated the name originally given by the Dutch in honour of their stadtholder, Maurice—were now consigned to the administration of the same governor. In some respects the French still completely obliterate all other colonization. The language of the lower classes is more akin to French than to any other tongue, though far enough off from it too. The habits and ways are generally French. The majority of villages and streets, country-houses, and sugar-estates bear the names of French governors, or those of properties which are of note in the mother country. We have so far tried to steal a march,

that by law English is the enforced language now of all official transactions; and we are daily sticking up superscriptions at the corners of the public thoroughfares, rendering into English the old titles, some of which, by the transformation, to say the least, sound funnily, while one or two—the 'Place d'Armes,' to wit, and the 'Chaussée' and 'Champ de Mars'—baffle translation altogether. The surnames of a series of governors thus commemorated are about all the wandering stranger has, by which to be reminded of an ephemeral popularity and transient fame, with one exception—that of La Bourdonnais. His is an undying one, thanks, probably, in some measure to Bernardin St Pierre. He figures, as is well known, in the romantic fiction of 'Paul and Virginia;' but his own history is none. He raised the colony from a state of comparative insignificance to one of considerable importance. He transferred the seat of government from the old Dutch site—Grand Port, or Mähebourg—to Port Louis. His administration was energetic, judicious, and paternal, and he is deservedly accounted the real founder of the commercial prosperity of the island. His memory is still so fresh and so popular, that sometimes you would almost think people were talking of a living man. Notwithstanding his great services, he, like many before and after him, succumbed to cabal. On his return to France, he was sent

to the Bastille, where he remained above three years. How often, as his eyes fell upon nothing but grated windows and dark damp walls, must his thoughts have wandered back in sad contrast to his beautiful island, his spice groves, his palms, his perennial sunshine, all little more now than a dream and mockery! He came out of his prison to die. Louis XV. granted his widow a small pension in consideration of his not having received any recompense for 'so much service,' and the Government of the Republic, in after years, went further still to redeem his memory, and probably to bring their own immaculate love of right into contrast with the gross injustice of kings. A pension of three thousand livres was settled on his daughter, Madame de Montlezun.

Monsieur de la Bourdonnais in bronze greets all new arrivals, when they land, as he probably once did in the flesh their predecessors. The statue was erected only a few years back by 'Maurice' (rather tardily), 'reconnaissant.' It is no bad specimen of modern French art. If it had issued from an English studio, we might have had him in buskins and a toga. As it is he is in buckled shoes and breeches, the more appropriate dress of his own day. The government having turned its back upon him, it almost seems as if there were a little intentional though masked sarcasm in placing him here. He now

turns his own back directly on 'Le gouvernement,' as the Creoles call the hideous great bird-cage of a building, where the incarnate representation of royalty resides when not in the country.

In 1810, the English, after more than one previous attempt of the same sort, landed under General Abercrombie. There was a little skirmishing, probably for form's sake, at the French outposts, and then capitulation. Since this we have held Mauritius uninterruptedly, the private property of the French colonists, the laws, and their religion, having been properly respected. Some of the French will still tell you they regret this transfer of rule. I doubt it; that is, I doubt that if to-morrow they could return to French allegiance they would. There is one feeling always as strong as that of loyalty—pelf. We understand colonization better than the French. Our French subjects in Mauritius have pockets, some of them empty enough—a state of finance, however, not wholly unknown to many English residents as well, but the French colony of Bourbon can furnish far fewer instances, I believe, of well-filled ones. Trade is brisk in Port Louis, stagnant in St Denis. The actual state of this island may be estimated from the fact of its coming down, two years ago, with a million and upwards, for two lines

of railway, each of them only 30 miles in length.*

It is in the very nature of Frenchmen to hold us cheap—we return the compliment; but in their hearts they respect us; and I, for one, can truly say I like them, and think there is a very great deal in them which, as a nation, we have not, and might with advantage adopt. They laugh at us often heartily on the great stage of the world, as well as on the more contracted one of the theatre, and do not we do the same by them?

I have gone a bit out of my way, and, may be, it will be thought unnecessarily; but another little digression will, I daresay, be put up with more readily. Having spoken rather fully of La Bourdonnais, I will now give the true version of the far-famed story, in which, thanks to the writer of it, he will live for ever. History does not treat him as justly as fiction!

In 1744, the then 'Isle de France' was on the verge of absolute famine. Locusts, in those days one of the commonest as well as severest scourges of the country, had visited it in a more than usually destructive number. Everything had been eaten up; drought had followed; added to which untoward state of things, alarm was felt

* Were I to write this now, 1867, I should have, I fear, to modify this assertion.

at the prolonged delay of the arrival of a vessel having on board a cargo of rice. At last she appeared off the coast; this was in the middle of the month of August. The ship so anxiously expected, and hailed as the salvation of the whole population of the place, bore the name of 'St Géran.' On board was Mademoiselle Caillou, a young lady coming out to some of her relations who were settled here. In those days a voyage was not a short business. Wooing could go on after the good old fashion. Time was given to the 'young people' to know each other, and to love heartily. One of the officers, Lieut. Moutandre, had accordingly thus wooed and won the affections of Mademoiselle Caillou. They were deeply attached to each other, already long since betrothed, and were to be married on their arrival in the island.

The 'St Géran' was to have landed the living portion of her freight at the entrance of what is now called the 'Baie du tombeau.' Arriving, however, late, Captain de la Marre stood out again to sea for the night. Unfortunately! At daybreak she was close in shore on the other side of the island; and, before long, struck on a reef between the 'Isle d'Ambre' and the coast. This island and that coast are now classic ground. The sea was running high with a heavy swell. The channel here is exceedingly narrow. The unfortunate vessel, thrown

with tremendous force on the coral bank, broke up rapidly. The captain, it is said, might have been saved by the assistance of a sailor, if he would have consented to strip and commit himself to the waves. When urged to do so he declared it beneath his dignity as a captain of the navy to reach the shore naked, or rather not in full uniform. Can anything speak more for the estimation etiquette was held in in those formal days?

For different reasons the same scruples seem to have influenced Mademoiselle Caillou. Here, to an author of Bernadin de St Pierre's turn of mind, was too precious an incident for him not to seize hold of it and introduce it prominently into his story. The unfortunate prototype of 'Virginia' was last seen standing with her lover on the only portion of the wreck that remained above water. A fierce sea was breaking over them both. Lieutenant Moutandre seemed in the act of supplicating the terrified girl to take advantage of the small raft he had hastily prepared, and divest herself of the heavier parts of her dress. The young lady steadily refused to commit so gross a breach of decorum. I question if in these days a like difficulty would exist for an instant, at any rate in Mauritius. Mademoiselle Caillou persisted in her refusal; and her lover, it is supposed, scorned any attempt to save himself alone, and so both were engulfed

unparted in the roaring waters. Very few of the passengers or crew escaped.

Such are the real circumstances of a disaster, which, while thousands and thousands, more harrowing in their details, have sunk into an oblivion as deep as the watery graves into which their victims went down, survives with all the freshness of a recent occurrence! I do not pause to ask, nor will the reader to think, why. But pray let him remember what was the state of society when Bernadin St Pierre took up his gifted pen to elaborate a theory which was the dream of the day. It was one of the corruptest periods, perhaps the most corrupt, that France had ever seen; and yet an outward sort of Arcadian simplicity was the prevailing fashion. Innocence, unsophisticated, untrammelled, was suddenly discovered to be the 'summum bonum' of life. The beauties of Paris, if we are to judge from the pictures handed down to us, were fonder of assuming the garb of shepherdesses than any other. They sat on green banks spangled with modest daisies, under green trees, with crooks in their hands and lambs at their feet. The lambs, in some respects resembling 'Bo-peeps,' may have left their innocence, if not their 'tails behind them,' but the outward lamb was there.

Bernadin St Pierre tells us himself that his object in writing was to persuade the world that

happiness in it "consists in living according to the laws of nature and virtue."

The inhabitants of tropical countries may certainly be nearer in some respects to nature than their northern brethren, but I doubt if they are a bit more to virtue.

The descriptions of character in this celebrated story are often simply absurd, overwrought, high-flown, and mawkishly sentimental; but the descriptions of scenery are as true to nature as the others are occasionally the reverse.

It was a truth of description, however, which in those *steamless* days few could have known, and consequently have really appreciated, and it seems next to marvellous—not, perhaps, that 'Paul and Virginia' should at first have acquired its world-wide fame—but that it should have preserved its reputation to the present time.

We ourselves live in too *real* days for high-flown sentiment and balderdash to go down. We prefer 'sensation;' but why I will not discuss, although I have my fancy that I could satisfactorily explain this problem.

CHAPTER IV.

A SMALL WORLD.

I SIT down, I confess, a little bit puzzled. How am I to reply to the question: 'What sort of society have you?' Well, I suppose we must own to our little peculiarities like many of our betters. Ours is necessarily a small world, and possibly more contracted than it need be—or, as I should better express it perhaps, divided. Here England and France often enter still on different sides, as they do in Shakespeare's plays. More's the pity! But, on the whole, no colony, I fancy, can boast of better ingredients for pleasant intercourse. For this I do not hesitate to say we are greatly indebted to the French element. Society is decidedly on an easy footing. It is not particularly intellectual. How should it be? The men, the greater part of them, scarcely allow themselves time for studying anything else but those lengthy columns of figures with £ *s.* *d.* at the top of them. The women are plunged up to their eyes in the quicksands of housekeeping, and in them the majority

flounder to the latest hour of life. To boot, they are, during their best years, equally lost in the absorbing and intricate mysteries of babyology. This often begins early, for a wife of fifteen is an every-day occurrence. But most of them are good-humoured, cordial, hospitably inclined, and at what, under circumstances, are reasonable hours, accessible. I do not think acquaintances, or even dear friends, cut patterns of imperfection out of each other behind their respective backs a bit more here than elsewhere. Of course, we have our constellations greater or less, and of course there are many members of our 'beau monde' whose great aim is to 'star it,' and who do 'star it' to the best of their abilities. Indeed this is more than elsewhere, I imagine, the case in Mauritius. Rank being tolerably equalized, people must outshine their neighbours somehow, and hence a frequent plunge into uncalled-for and unwarranted extravagance. Several of these ambitious people make speedy shipwreck in the attempt, and briefly flashing across the horizon of the Mauritian world of fashion, eventually set in comparative obscurity. There generally seems, however, to have been some one startling act of hospitality in their bright ephemeral career, the remembrance of which hangs by them and distinguishes them, though ever so faintly, to the last. I know one or two such fallen stars by sight, and they have invariably been pointed out

to me as 'poor dear' Mrs So and So, who formerly lived here or there in the very best style, and did this or that in the very best, i. e. lavish manner.

Perhaps one of the most diverting features of colonial society is the mushroom greatness of little people. Here is the suddenness and rapidity of tropical vegetation with a vengeance. No plant can be hardier or flower more freely than colonial self-importance. Many leave their native shores pigmies and land giants. Hitherto dusky grubs, they burst forth into the gaudiest of butterflies the moment they set foot on the new soil. We have several ludicrous specimens of such 'insect transformation.' One most especially.

'Ne vous fachez pas,' whispered Madame ——, a vivacious little French woman, by whom I was standing the first time I saw Mr and Mrs —— at ——; they rarely condescend to move in a less exalted sphere; but 'why is it only among you English one sees de pareilles caricatures?'

Let some one answer for me, for I do not know how! Madame ——'s remark is not flattering, but it is nevertheless true. In the case in point the lady, who is said to be a 'blue,' was every colour as well that night—a sort of Scotch harlequin; the gentleman the best specimen I ever saw, off the stage, of full-blown pomposity.

He looked, in addition, marvellously like a descendant of Abraham one might have fancied he had higgled with for his own and his wife's finery. It was the genus crow and the species scare, without a doubt. These funny people affect the strictest exclusiveness, on the ground of superiority, but in what it would be really difficult to guess with the liveliest imagination.

Being on the subject of dress, a word or two more before I quit it. It is a positive passion here, and scarcely less exaggerated among the lower than the higher classes. It has one peculiarity. It is often not so much how a gown looks, but how much was paid for it. The toilettes of the softer sex are not, for the most part, rated as to taste, but as to cost. The saying that 'fine feathers make fine birds' must be decidedly of Mauritian origin. Popularity, perhaps indeed even reputation, is to be purchased at so much a yard. I happened one day to say to ——, 'Was not Madame —— once looked upon as a "frisky matron?"'

'Well! yes, I believe there was an awkward story or two; but, to be sure, how handsomely she dresses.'

I have been assured that the darker-tinted 'votaries of fashion' will endure any privation in order to indulge in a smartly-bedizened bonnet or a flashy silk gown at church—*church parade*, that is; and that many nearly starve

throughout the eleven intervening months in order to achieve two distinct toilettes, of the latest cut, on the race-course. There are, as you may imagine, many exceptions, but, as a rule, the dressing of the Mauritian 'beau monde' is not in the best taste, and probably for the reason above given.

Madame or Mademoiselle may come forth in all the freshness of spick and spanism, and look exceedingly pretty; she may sport a most becoming colour, and even a most 'lovely thing;' but if the cost of the 'lovely thing' be under the standard price she is pronounced most decidedly 'mal mise.' If a visit be paid, even to the most intimate neighbour, there is invariably an elaborate 'get up' for the occasion. Nor is the climate always taken into due consideration. If the article be costly the temperature signifies little. Madame —— came to see A. one day,—a winter's day, certainly, according to the calendar, but recollect we are in the tropics. The lady wore a 'robe de damas' as stiff as herself, and a crimson velvet 'manteau.'

Good heavens! I was in a flame at the very sight of it. Fanny Kemble's red satin gown was nothing to it, and her confession that she looked like a 'bonfire' whenever she wore it not half as reasonable as Madame ——'s might have been. I always considered the lady of the

crimson cloak an unmistakable example of the style 'endimanche,' the prevailing one more or less, I should say, in Mauritius. If you call on a Creole lady at home you are, nine times out of ten, quite sure to have ample time to take an inventory, if you desire it, of every article of the drawing-room furniture. When at length Madame bustles in, she looks as if she had just emerged from a 'carton,' from which, or its equivalent, you may rest assured the whole of her *outward* dress has been extracted since you set foot in the house. The 'ars celandi artem' is not well practised here. This is the more ridiculous, as every one must know, after a few days' residence in any private house, what the real nature of Creole ladies' household duties is. As long as their servants are what they are, the mistress' duties cannot fail to be different. I said one day to a young lady,

'What a pity that pretty little Mrs —— is always such a figure. Just look at that tumbled, faded gown!'

'Yes,' replied Mademoiselle; 'but when new, it must have cost at least ten piastres a yard.'

I may observe, *en passant*, that Mauritian young ladies seem to me only very talkative on this one subject, and never but then to shake off all apathy. If you see two conversing together with any degree of energy, you may rest assured

dress is their topic. On every other they strike me as marvellously chary of their words, and languid in their conversation. I say so rather feelingly at this moment. I sat last night between two at dinner, and when —— asked me how I liked it, I must own I thought of the Frenchman's question and his friend's answer: 'Eh, bien! comment s'est passé le dîner? Assez bien, mon ami, mais sans moi je m'y serais terriblement ennuyé.'

Well, having for your especial edification somewhat enlarged on female gear, I must say a word on that of my own sex. Few men, comparatively speaking, excepting the officers of the army and the common soldiers, are ever clothed as one eagerly hastens to be even on a solitary summer's day in England, when there is one. Cloth is far more prevalent than linen. Flannel shirts are very generally worn day after day throughout the year. I have been assured over and over again that such is the only safe way of dressing in a climate in which one cannot help melting half away once at least in the twenty-four hours. I have always, however, flown in the face of this advice, and I have never repented, as yet, of my obstinacy. I believe exercise, moderate eating and drinking, and constant bathing, are the secrets of good health in this as in other hot climates. One instance, however, of light clothing—not military—I used to meet

with at one time almost daily in a Mr ——, whom I generally had to pass on the road as I drove into town. He was all white, and always white. A white helmet, a white jacket, a white waistcoat, white trousers, white stockings, white shoes, and a white pony! in short, the only things I ever remarked not white about him were his neckcloth and his hands. As a set-off, and I cannot help thinking the idea of the single shade had originated in his mind from seeing *the man in white,* I once came across young ——, all grey. The material, or rather the shade of it, that composed his whole dress from head to foot must surely have been made expressly to go with his horse; at any rate, it was a capital match. The whole group, like the ghostly cavalier in 'Don Giovanni,' looked as if it were cut out of one and the same piece of stuff. They would have done well as a model for a diminutive centaur — one scarcely perceived where the man ended or the animal began. The difference here was in the hair and boots, both so glossy and so brilliantly polished, that I almost fancied the same brush, dipped unsparingly in Warren's japan, had been employed not less on one extremity of the horseman than the other.

CHAPTER V.

OUR CAPITAL.

I HAVE already described the style of the houses of Port Louis, and have now only to jot down a few other facts about it.

No town should be cleaner than this capital of Mauritius, few can well be dirtier, and without excuse; for standing as it does, partly at the base, partly on the slope, of green hills, a copious provision of water is at hand for the use of the town, and would flow down as far and as freely as permitted. There is no reason, then, whatever why there should not be at least a periodical clearance of the gutters, which are all open, and for the most part lie before you choked up with filth fermenting and fetid, from one end of the year to the other.

Noses, I suppose, 's'acclimatent,' or a native Member of Council could not have declared, as he did lately, that Port Louis in regard to dirt is one of the least offensive towns in the world. But Creoles, it would seem, neither see nor smell Creole defects. Before it would be possible to

have either the houses or streets what they might be, a good big pipe or two would have to be turned upon the habits of the people.*

Yet these same are they, who, in the hour of evil, can be vehement in their dissatisfaction and vociferous in their disapprobation of all government measures. In case they should not exactly tally with their own, which are but too often imbued with the antiquated and unscientific prejudices of a by-gone age, there is instantly a loud outcry.

It may well be imagined, then, what a hot-bed for sickness Port Louis ought to be; and so it is! Low fever in various shapes has gradually increased till it has become endemic. The last visit of the cholera was a period of absolute consternation. The panic was general. It had scarcely died out when we arrived, and there were echoes still of the hot abuse of the governor.

The virulence of a paltry venal press, and what I almost think less pardonable, a pre-eminently stupid one, is supposed by many to have acted fatally on a too sensitive disposition, and to

* According to the late able report of Dr E., '*only one-fourth of the excreta* of the 78,000 inhabitants of Port Louis is removed; the remainder is left to be absorbed by the earth, or is carried into the open drains and ditches of the town, where often in a stagnant condition under the influence of a tropical sun, it quickly evaporates, filling the air with poisonous exhalations.'

have originated the disease, which not long after killed him, depriving the colony of one of the most efficient rulers it had ever had.

It is when a pestilence like that of cholera sets foot on these shores, stalks boldly through the land, and revels in a field carefully prepared for its reception by the dirty habits of the people, that you hear of the precautions with which the *government* should have been prepared to meet it. It comes—the inhabitants stand aghast; it goes again, and back they turn to their old ways of living, if indeed they have even for a while quitted them, to their apathy, their careless, reckless indolence. Each day, each hour, seed is being cast for another and a more fearfully abundant harvest, and, as soon as ripe, Death raises the avenging sickle and thousands are cut down.*

Some of the circumstances of the cholera in Mauritius are very curious. It made its first appearance in 1819. Its last visit was early in 1862; the second and worst in 1854. The first interval was one of 35 years, the other one of eight.

Be the cause what it may, whether the decrease of periodical and purifying hurricanes, or

* At the very time I am correcting the press, comes an account from Mauritius verifying but too terribly these prophetic words. Fever rages, and people are dying daily by hundreds; but principally, I am informed, among the careless, indolent, and dirty.

the increased importation of Indians, there can be no doubt this island was more free from sickness formerly than now. Upon the high authority of an experienced medical officer from India, cholera in 1854 was announced to the inhabitants of Mauritius to be hovering over the threshold, but to no purpose. Until come it did, the people were content to do nothing more than hope it would not. It was unmistakably present, at the time of its second visit, early in May. It raged to the middle of June, when the number of cases began to decline. Its fury, however, every now and then broke out afresh, like a fiercely expiring flame.

It was reckoned that, in that of 1862, throughout, the deaths were at the rate of 50 per diem. The greatest havoc was naturally made in the huddled-up, dirty, over-crowded 'camps' of the planters' Indian labourers; yet still* to this day, with slight exceptions, they are the same.

Strange to say, though true, the confirmed drunkards, who persisted in their sottish habits, for the most part escaped. Among the Chinamen, who are so generally given up to the intoxicating effects of opium, there were no more than two or three cases either of illness or

* Since this was written I am told more general efforts are being made to compel the improvement of the condition of the Malabars.

death; while the sober people, who incidentally used spirits as medicine, for the most part succumbed. A complete panic prevailed; scarcely a heart but quailed; and nothing could well be more cowardly or disgraceful than the general conduct of the inhabitants; nor were such instances, I was told, quite confined to the lowest classes. Pluck, either moral or physical, is not inherent in black blood.* Ties, even the closest, seemed snapped, while it was suddenly deemed incumbent to rivet irrevocably others hitherto loose. The moment of imminent danger had roused many a callous conscience. I heard more than once of a 'mariage coléra,' and

* I one day witnessed a tolerable proof of this. I was driving a friend of mine out of town, when we came upon a fat Chinaman whose face was fearfully swollen, and his head profusely bleeding under blows from a good big stick still in the hands of a white-skinned bully. They were grappling together most unequally. Five or six Creole blacks were standing almost near enough to touch them, looking eagerly on, but not one had offered the slightest assistance; and S., not half the bully's size, but with a heart big enough for a body twice its own, jumped out of the carriage, collared him, and walked him off crest-fallen to the next police station. An extra quantum of bravery on the part of the bystanders then suddenly awoke, but it still oozed out as before from the tips of their tongues. The cause of the quarrel was debt. The Chinaman would not trust his customer any longer, and so bill and creditor were being paid off thus when we came up, and settled the account at once by handing the transgressor over to the neighbouring police.

could not guess what this meant. On inquiring into its peculiarity, I found that during this time of quivering dismay, people felt a sudden respect for the ordinances of the Church. These marriages took place by dozens between couples who for long had lived together only by mutual agreement, and hence the name they now go by.

Dr —— told me that he had one morning gone into a house which I often had occasion to pass, having heard there was a case in it. Arrived at the door, he called, but no one answered; and pushing it open, and entering an inner room, four dead bodies, sole occupants of the house, lay before him—some, if not all, abandoned, in all probability, while yet living.

When on a visit to ——, I saw an Indian girl whom he had himself taken from her dead mother's side. The woman had been left to die by every one belonging to her, and the hungry infant was still tugging at the dry insensible breast when —— found her. The Creoles shut themselves up, and sought forgetfulness of the surrounding consternation in drink. The Indians took to sacrificing goats to appease the wrath of their gods. But among so many instances of abject cowardice there were bright instances of the most exalted defiance of danger. The Protestant and Romish clergy, especially, forgot every difference of creed, and faced the fiend as holy men hand in hand manfully to-

gether. To this hour the *contagionists* and the *non-contagionists* are the 'Bianchi' and 'Neri' of Mauritius. I use the expression in its historical, not in its literal, sense; as one might almost be supposed to do in this mixed population.

CHAPTER VI.

IN-DOORS.

It is high time I should say a word or two on that world-wide topic, that perennial spring of bother, that chronic 'worrit'—Housekeeping. The dames of Mauritius must agree pretty well, I imagine, with that great female authority 'Todgers.' She, we know, was of opinion that presiding over such establishments makes havoc with the features, and that the 'gravy' alone is equivalent to the premature addition of 20 years. Gravy has not probably the same withering effect in Mauritius, for the simple reason, I should say, that there is less of it. It is not the failing of meat here to be juicy—but Creole housewives must equally come to an early and distressing conclusion that the *Bazaar* is quite as bad. 'That one word,' Bazaar, is enough to have 'slain ten thousand' housekeepers. It is a never-ceasing, ever-returning dilemna. No mistress of a family is free from it. She goes to bed with it and gets up with it; and who shall tell what terrific dreams, what phantoms

of emaciated mutton and desiccated beef assail her in her slumbers? 'By 'Bazaar' you are to understand everything Madame la Menagère, not commanding at home, has perforce to obtain from town, such as, with occasional intermission, meat, fish, fruit, vegetables, and so on. Hence the frequent and useful account we husbands are turned to as daily carriers. Raw meat, and what is worse, slimy fish disporting in a most lively way about one's feet at the bottom of the carriage, are the constant *small parcels* 'we are to be sure on no account to forget if we wish to dine!' This injunction is given almost as regularly as the parting kiss, when the husband turns his horses' heads office-wards after breakfast. Against the fish I at first rebelled—but finally yielded, tucking up my feet against the splash-board when necessary!

'Who does your Bazaar?' is one of the first questions put when the holiday, on first arrival, is over, and one is fairly launched on the troubled waters of domesticity. Verily from the first there are visible breakers ahead! As to servants, that ever pricking thorn in the housewife's side, as a rule they are execrable. They are dirty, they are lazy and drunken, and lying and thieving. Exceptions we have now and then, and I really believe we are of the favoured few who can say so from experience, but this, again, is by comparison. The best are decidedly to be met with among the

Indians; but even with these, if you want a thing done you must condescend to see it done. You must positively stand over them in their work, or work is not. It is for this reason that unless you can get your ire sufficiently well-up and daily pump in the requisite quantity of energy—an exhausting effort in this climate—the sooner you inwardly confess that you are no match for them, and tacitly resign yourself to defeat, the better. No European patience can make head for long against the dogged impassibility of black servants. Work they can well, at any rate the Indians can, but work they won't. As to attachment to a master or mistress ever so indulgent and kind, the feeling is unknown, with the exception, I believe, occasionally of former slaves. Some few of these, old as they now are, both in age and emancipation, still prefer to hang about the scenes of their once compulsory services; a problem for Mrs Beecher Stowe to solve. The genuine black natives of the island are almost universally filthy in their habits, and in their persons too, and slovenly to the last degree, if not disgustingly dirty, in their dress—generally both. Nevertheless, one mercifully gets in some degree used to it all. You look round and see your neighbours almost as badly and sometimes worse off than yourself, and there is, people may say what they like, much comfort in that!

I must confess the first time I beheld a muddy

foot-mark on the drawing-room floor; I started back as violently as ever did Robinson Crusoe on discovering 'Friday's' on the sea-shore; but when soon after I called on Mrs —— on a rainy day, I saw a dozen, and so very soon my 'Friday' came in and went out without my perceiving that he left any trace of his fat little foot behind him. On arriving we were provided, through a neighbour's kindness, with an ebon damsel, in the possession of whose services we were at once strongly urged to consider ourselves very fortunate, specially blessed indeed—'She is one in a thousand,' cried Mrs ——. Oh, how often I did try to be thankful for this blessing; but no! oh, with shame be it said! I could not contrive to be thankful even up to the very day of her departure. A. one morning observed a mass of graceful festoons on the iron rod at the top of our bedstead, which, upon narrower inspection, was discovered to be the dwelling-place of a very industrious and very big spider. It was hinted to Eudoxie that the bed, as it was, was hardly large enough for two, and that the dark long-legged gentleman, who had taken up his abode above, might consequently as well be wiped away at once, together with his household property, the cobwebs. 'Ah pour ça oui,' replied Eudoxie, pushing a chair civilly in the necessary direction, 'mais Madame peut faire cela elle-même, cela me fatigue trop les épaules,'—and

such 'épaules!' Well, I should remark, perhaps, that just then—no! not *just then*, for really she never seemed to be otherwise—Eudoxie was in that state in which 'ladies love to be who love their lords,' and hence possibly those shoulders easily tired, but without doubt a flock of naked, slobbering, squalling little black monsters, always transgressing prescribed bounds, pushing their little woolly mops of heads, with large, round, porcelain-looking, prying eyes in them, into every nook and corner. They caused me to be often looked upon by Eudoxie as a stony-hearted parent. I used to turn round on them, open my mouth like a cannibal, and scare the whole troop; and into the first hole at hand they tumbled like rabbits in a warren. So far Eudoxie's answer did not come up to one we had at the Cape of Good Hope, when a young lady playing with her cotton parasol said, she had 'no objection to try *us* for a month,' and, what is flattering, she did so, and found us worth remaining with several years.

My European friends would be highly amused to hear some of the Creole ladies talking of their 'femmes de chambre,' as if they were themselves so many 'Countess Almavivas,' and these waiting slatterns perfect 'Suzannes.'

A. remonstrated one day with the 'shoulders' for being somewhat too bare, peeping as they did through the holes of a 'dirty tattered jacket.

They shrugged themselves up quite coquettishly with, "Mais, Madame . . . J'ai cru . . . que . . . du moins pour la campagne . . . !"

Well! one day, 'O terque quaterque' blest, we got rid of Eudoxie and her 'lord' and all the little black mops; and from that hour to the one of departure from Mauritius, female attendance was dispensed with by us. We had a *self*, so far that we daily shook it up ourselves, but *bonâ fide* made bed; a room really brushed out in a *masterly* way, for that was my office, and only cobwebs of a few hours' weaving. This you must make up your mind to, for if you turn your back only five minutes, and give him time to fix his loom, the weaver is at work. Such is the love of labour in one portion of the creation, at least, in the tropics!

The Creole ladies generally have little notion of comfort, much less of any little coquettish arrangement of their drawing-rooms. There is a most disagreeable look of primness in almost all of them. Chairs, like refractory children who have been put in the corner, stand sulkily, bolt upright, against the wall; and the sofas, like so many stiff old maids, are in the same way uncomfortably polite. Added to this, a footstool is invariably stuck in front of them, so that a visitor without experience often tumbles forward into the lap of 'Madame' as he bends towards her with the intention of bowing politely, but less

positively. A table, and in order not to hide the 'superbe acajou': without any cover, stands nakedly in the middle of the room, like a solitary island in the wide ocean with a sparse population, represented here by a tea set—all gilding and flowers—never used, and occasionally sufficiently bereft of limbs to have been long since entitled to a retiring pension, or repose for the rest of time in an obscurer corner. Sometimes you have a vase with a faded wax bouquet in it. It would be too much exertion (I speak with reserve) to make up a daily nosegay of the exquisite flowers which are at hand all the year round. Nothing denotes occupation, mental or corporeal, unless it be an open pianoforte and a well-thumbed music book. Signs of daily habitation are utterly wanting; perhaps a chair may have left its place on the wall, and then you discover how the paper is almost sure just there to have kept its original tint; and so far the chair had better not have stalked out towards the place of honour, enthroned on which the mistress of the house receives you. What Bulwer so elegantly calls the 'whereabouts of women' are nowhere to be seen. There are none of the now elsewhere universally found beautiful and refined small 'coquetteries' of the writing-table. For all you see in this way, you would not suppose Creole ladies could write at all, nor read either. There may possibly be a solitary 'journal,' but not a book open or shut,

not even one of those jaundice-coloured French volumes, which have been lately described as the 'concentrated essence of the world, the flesh, and the devil in yellow paper covers,'—still they are sold, and therefore must be read somewhere!

I once went into the so-called 'study' of one of the finest houses of Mauritius. The possessor of it had just been writing a letter, indeed was in the act of folding it up as I entered; his blotting-book was an old newspaper, his inkstand a ci-devant pomatum pot. Another day I went into the same room. It was so far a 'study' then that the eldest boy was plodding over a crumpled spelling-book, but newspaper blotting-book and pomatum-pot inkstand were in their places. When one comes however to the dining-room, it is different. Here is the seat of glory, the shrine of a god most universally worshipped in Mauritius. People here live to eat, —— remarked to me one day with his mouth full, rather than eat to live. You cannot imagine the immensity of breakfasting out, of 'tiffining' out, of dining out, in the course of the year. If the inhabitants of Mauritius love good cheer themselves, it is not selfishly. They are never happier than when the guests are many that are bidden. Yet cooks for the most part are bad! and hospitality could scarcely go the pace it does here but for two resources, which luckily are always at

hand. These are the rival restaurants of the 'Flore Mauricienne' and of 'Paul Morillon,' the superiority of which of the two is still, and ever, I suppose, will be, a vexed question. From the ovens of one or the other the most artistic portions of these great dinners invariably issue. Thence, I think, a somewhat two prevalent sameness of good things. You have the 'Pâté de foie gras,' the 'galantine,' the 'dinde truffée,' and the 'pintade piquée' with the same sauce and identical flavour on every Mauritian dinner-table, 'à prétention.' A 'Charlotte Russe' is a *sine quâ non*. If this be wanting, woe betide the reputation of the house with the female portion of the guests. The prices paid for these dishes are enough to make the hair of any host, who studies common economy, stand on end. Four pounds for the turkey, and the same for a ham, is nothing out of the common, and will give you some idea of the dearness of living. The almost prevailing fault of these feasts is that you do not get anything hot; but on reflecting that every kitchen is in a separate building from the house, and not often placed with an eye to convenience, also that there are such things as tropical showers, and Creole carelessness, one's only wonder is there can be ever warmth at all in soup, or fish, or fowl, or flesh. But there is another kind of warmth that amply makes up for this or any other deficiency, the

warmth of welcome. Take my word for it, you do not know what national hospitality is till you come and see it here. Go where you will throughout the island, an inhabitant is never so happy as when he holds out his hand, seizes yours and bids you pass the threshold of his house. *A propos* of that, I often wished it were not so much the fashion to seize hands. When foreigners adopt our habits they are sure to improve upon them, or to think they do. I never was in any place before where such a universal shaking of hands prevails. Do not suppose, either, that though borrowed from us, it is performed after our fashion. 'I like your English way,' M. said to me one day, 'of shake, and'— 'Ah!' 'It is so warm.' 'Very,' I *said;* here, at any rate, I *thought.* It is, I assure you, in Mauritius a most vehement and excruciating operation, and performed as often as not in grave and solemn silence. Like Bob Acre's courage, it is often from the fingers' ends that Creole welcome oozes out. The oldest and the youngest, — indeed, so somehow would, I believe, babies in long clothes, if long clothes there were in the tropics, rush up before you have well got into the room, seize, grasp, and, without a syllable, put your hand in a thumb-screw and twist. It matters not that you are not personally acquainted with any one in the room. You may never have set eyes on a

single individual of the company before; your hand, nevertheless, is dragged into this natural pressing machine by each, and in an instant your whole frame vibrates. I have, I confess it, more than once had recourse to innocent subterfuge, in order to avoid a too rapid recurrence of this digital invasion—this forlorn hope of hands. I have blessed my tailor for giving me side-pockets, and a severe cold has suddenly come on bringing my kerchief to my nose. When the —— were spied coming down our hill, well knew I the usual neighbourly welcome to be fast approaching, and, but for means of escape craftily devised, imminent. Imagine the boisterous pressure of eight pair of hands in the tropics—of 80 often ungloved fingers in less than a minute under an almost perpendicular sun! I say 80 fingers, because there is always the most scrupulously conscientiously ex-*pressed*, if not uttered, 'Adieu,' as well as 'Bon jour.' These good friends invariably ask us if we are going to church, for such meetings are generally on Sundays. Now, as our prayer-books are sticking out from under our arms, and our faces are turned towards that small ugly Cupola, in which the bell is still hammering, for ring it does not, really that question, to put which we are hebdomadally stopped, and our hands consequently convulsively grasped, each returning sabbath, has at times seemed to me, if not unnecessary, superfluous.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT O' DOORS.

I HAVE just come back from a ramble in the interior, and tear out a few leaves from my diary for the post.

Into Town early with S——, and found Mr C——'s boat all ready for us; sails up, and he seated at the stern, tiller in hand. Started without delay, about seven, for 'Rivière Noire;' cloudy, little or no wind. Coasted along just outside the reef. The mountains standing out well and sharply against a grey sky. A little way off this western shore they are seen to great advantage. The eye takes them in from base to summit, with the slightest interruption, the intervening land being quite flat. The sombre heights of the 'Corps de Garde,' with its recumbent figure* of a recent king, whose dynasty was hewn out of a less solid material, were just now in fine con-

* This is a natural effigy of Louis Philippe, and really most remarkable. He lies on his back as he might have done in his coffin, wonderfully lifelike, if the word can be strictly used in this instance.

trast to acres of bright, fresh, green sugar canes, slightly undulating in the feeble breeze. A good many sharks hovering about our boat—the *white shark*—the dorsal fin constantly above the water, and the cruel brute almost near enough for us to touch him. Our course slow but pleasant; a slight ripple on the sea, and no glaring sun. Eat our breakfast, and with as much gusto probably as our white friends following in the wake of the boat would have displayed feasting upon us,—opportunity given. This kind of shark, however, is said not to be very ferocious. The Indians, S. tells me, eat them greedily.

Landed at the military Station, where Mr O. received us with no less good nature for being, himself and quarters, in unusual perturbation. He had just heard that a superior officer was actually on his way down 'to take possession' —wife and nursery included—without previous notice. Superior officers,—or is it the often superior officer still, the lady,—seem at times peculiarly inclined so to arrive. Poor Mrs O.'s late tranquil dwelling was upside down. The 'penetralia' all in a heap, exposed to vulgar eyes, lying *pêle-mêle* on the verandah. Saucepans, feather-beds, parrots, and pickles, all cheek-by-jowl! Mrs O. laughed, relieving us at once from the necessity of any grave condolence; so we sipped our sherry at our ease, and admired Mr O.'s clever sketches and Mrs O.'s good humour

under circumstances that certainly tested it. Walked up later beneath the shade of a fine avenue of tamarind trees, just now loaded with their long green pods, to what in England we should call 'the Squire's house.' Host absent, but we received a most courteous invitation to dine and sleep there from Madame G. Having settled this point—one of great importance to us chance wanderers—and deposited our bags, called on a neighbour, Mr L., who, after the accustomed glass of sherry, and welcome, took us a walk towards the 'Baie du Morne.' This 'Morne' is an isolated headland, and the boldest bit of coast-scenery of the island; but it need not be supposed very bold for all that. A picturesque wild corner of country enough; at this moment vividly green from recent rains, shut in on all sides, seawards excepted, by mountains. These, as usual, well wooded from base to summit. In the foreground a very forest of aloes, of the two common kinds, with here and there the object I always look for, a solitary palm thrusting its tall slim stem out of the bush, and standing up against the twilight sky like a silhouette. Returned to dinner at the great house—first acquaintance with a Creole 'Intérieur' 'pur sang,' kind people; no attempt at display; a good solid simple repast, and the table amply supplied by 'bassecour' and 'potager'—cheerful, quiet talk; the only disturbed thing being a servant unused, it would seem, to a

sudden influx of company. There was evidently a strange confusion in the poor fellow's brain for the moment, and an utter incapacity of discrimination. I asked for salt, and he brought me wine. On saying I would again trouble the individual sitting opposite to the dish I was hungry enough to wish to go back to, my plate, to my dismay, was whisked off for good and all. But these 'gaucheries' tested the innate good-breeding of our hostess, and I could not help thinking how such little things are like straws thrown up to tell how the wind is! A 'parvenue' would at least have shown signs of 'flurry.' Madame G. laughed, trying in a good-humoured way to call back the man's wits, and relishing the fun of his face, which was one of exceeding dismay.

The female sex predominated: besides S. and myself, only one other gentleman, an unexpected arrival, I fancy, like ourselves, excepting, however, the tame cat of the family, as one saw him to be at a glance, M. L' Abbé. All due honour and respect paid to him throughout the evening; the first served, the last invited. I like this sort of quiet homage, this deferential childlike fealty to the spiritual pastor. Many a poor tolerated country curate with us may draw unpleasant comparisons. The relative positions and relationship of the ladies puzzled me. There was a very old one all in black, with a small

black cap tight to her head, quite a Rembrandt-study, whom I at once set down as 'Grand' Maman,' and called so, in speaking to a merry little creature at my side, one of a bevy of sunny faces, and I got such a glance from those two laughing eyes as told me plainly it was not 'Grand' Maman' at all. Soon afterwards I ventured again, my shot equally bad, to the great delight a second time of my lively little friend. I addressed an agreeable, chatty, but not very youthful, lady as 'Madame.' She turned out to be 'tantine' and 'la vieille demoiselle' of the company, and I was told, why?—that her story had been, as the old song has it, 'a simple one; a very old one, too.'

Coffee on the verandah; a deliciously fresh air and bright moonlight; these are the moments that repay one for a tropical mid-day; the evening and the early morning are divine, and to see the people sitting listlessly in their deep chairs, giving themselves up entirely to the soft languor that then creeps over one, you would think them the most careless beings on earth, as, in one sense perhaps, they are. I felt, as I said good night, that I should have liked to know more of these kind, well-bred people and their unostentatious ways of life.

We were to be off at daylight. Slept in a 'pavillon,' if never closing my eyes can be called sleep. Mosquitoes in terrible abundance,

and fearfully greedy of new blood. I had lately read, in a book of travels, and somehow with faith, that spirits of turpentine rubbed on the face would insure rest in Mosquitia itself. I had therefore taken a bottle of the reputed specific with me, and I made my cheeks smart with the contents before I stepped into bed—never so devoured, so tormented in my life.

Glad to get up, unrested as I was, which I did as soon as there was a glimmer of light in my room, and I stepped out, just as I was, into the open air to cool my blood. Day was just breaking; the landscape all bathed in a grey mist. This accorded well with the scene, which had a sad look of bygone golden days. The house, like many another here, was once widely famous for hospitality on a grand scale. There is something peculiarly melancholy but truly beautiful in these frequent records of a reverse of fortune in Mauritius. The vegetation, suffered to run where it will in the no longer cared-for garden, is rank in a week. It is as if nature herself were instantly hanging garlands on a tomb.

Partridges were calling in every direction, and wood-doves beginning to coo out of a dark mass of mangoes; this kind is peculiar, I believe, to the property, and takes its name from the owner. The fruit is the size of a small melon, and of a most delicious flavour, though not equal,

I think, to the 'figet,' but the varieties of mangoes are legion.

Started on foot up the gorge, our bags on the shoulders of Malabars, who followed at our heels. The novelty of the whole thing put briskness into me at once. I soon ceased to remember the mosquitoes, or to feel the effects of my sleepless night, and S—— was as springy as a lark. As the sun got higher and higher, streams of glorious light poured into the narrow defile, bringing out, more and more distinctly every instant, scenery of the most exquisite beauty. The mountains closed in upon us as we proceeded, the valley narrowing at every forward step; the river rushed by at our side, masses of rock here and there were mirrored in an occasional still, deep, transparent pool, extending far under the shelving cliff, from the rough sides of which hung down yards and yards of creeping plants, which dipped the tips of their garlands in the water. We could see the carp slumbering just below the surface. After some walking we struck into the 'Grande Gorge,' and a little further up came to our halting-place, a most romantically situated spot, formed by a small amphitheatre of green slopes, at the point where the valleys meet.

Here we found a collection of huts composed of mud and bamboo, and thatched with the great spiky leaves of the aloe. The ground cultivated on all sides. Mr L—— was expected by his

Malabars, it being pay-day, and the various groups, some squatted on the ground, some standing up, some lying full length, and others leaning, pipe in mouth, against the stems of trees, added not a little to the picturesqueness of the scene. Their costumes were varied enough in make, material, and colour, somewhat scanty too in many cases. We sat down to an excellent breakfast at a long table under a mere roof of leaves, otherwise quite 'al fresco,' hungry as horses, and capital provender, as it turned out, in the manger. Some portions of our day's fare would have told us, if our eyes had not, how 'far away' we were. There was a dish of young parrots just shot, and a very good one too, and Mr L—— was regretting that he had not been able to set before us one of the greatest delicacies of the island,—in what shape does the reader think? a huge bat. I have not yet seen more of this creature than a picture, so I wait to describe it till I know it better; but describe it or not, it will always be a bat.

Just after dinner, a good-sized monkey was brought in still warm, and I saw him skinning near the kitchen fire. The lower class have a cannibal taste, and greatly enjoy their roast monkey for their Sunday's dinner.

Breakfast was nearly over when a party of 'chasseurs' from the mountains opposite came in drenched to the skin. They had gone up in

search of 'cabris,' wild goats, but had not seen one, and had only fallen in with the heavy showers we had somehow escaped below.

Mr L—— had proposed we should explore the valley, and off we went. The gorge narrowed as we ascended it. Slippery walking on the edge of the rapid stream dancing merrily along; the rocks tufted with green moss glittering with spray drops. The scenery was of a ravishing beauty, the blue sky over head often quite shut out by the over-arching, interlacing branches, leaning across like eager friends holding out a hand of good fellowship to each other. Here it was I first saw, to know it, the ebony * tree, of which Mr L—— told me there are two kinds in the woods. The black wood, so much prized in Europe, forms the heart of the tree,—the outer case, which is of a coarser grain, being of a dusty-looking white—hence the rarity of large pieces, large I mean in circumference. The citron family in abundance, the 'bigarade,' † the same, I fancy, as we call the Seville orange, indigenous: it figures in many a nostrum of Creole old ladies. The 'Mandarin;' ‡ the pamplemousse,§ or shadock, often a good-sized tree. Vanille,‖ which is an orchid, and still much cultivated in Mauritius, winding itself round anything near a dwell-

* Dios pyrus ebenus.

† Citrus vulgaris. ‡ Citrus nobilis.

§ Citrus decumana. ‖ Vanilla planifolia.

ing. M——e told me that of late years the profit scarcely repays the large amount of trouble the plant requires before the pod is fit for exportation. Mexico sends home too large a quantity and at a cheaper rate for the trade of Mauritius to be as brisk as some years ago. Vanille is just now in flower, greenish unostentatious clusters, but the perfume extremely delicate.* Another plant I had not hitherto observed, thickly covering the surface of the ground, with a pretty convolvulus-shaped flower, I found to be the 'patate,'* or sweet potato, a very favourite Creole vegetable. Mr L—— told me he had just cleared one acre and bagged 36,000 pounds. Coffee† trees were numerous, not only the wild species. M. had lately added to his previous stock by planting 40,000 new 'pieds,' of the Mocha species. Nothing can be prettier than this shrub when it is in full flower. The white blossoms coming out thickly in regular pairs, like twin stars, all along the branch, and exhaling the most delicious fragrance. The blossom soon falls; then come on rapidly the berries; when ripe, they are of a deep red, like small oblong cherries; as soon as they are quite purple they are picked, spread out on the ground in the sun, and opened for the extraction of the double seed found in each perfect berry, and which is so familiar to us in the windows of

* Batatis edulis. † Coffea Mauritiana—Arabica.

European grocers. A thin filmy skin is taken off the seed, and when the latter has been properly dried, it is fit for use. Nothing can be simpler than the whole process. A great many people grow their own coffee, and find it a source of considerable profit when also cultivated for sale. This one can easily understand, for not a house, great or small, exists probably throughout the island, where the early morning cupful is not swallowed as regularly as the sun rises. The plant, when once the ground is chosen, requires but little care; the roots must be kept free from weeds, and it likes shade, for which reason you often see it growing under taller trees than itself. The leaf is not unlike the myrtle, but larger.

Before we returned we had thoroughly explored this and the sister valley, at least as far as we went, both equally beautiful. Nothing could be more obliging than our host, who seemed pleased with my occasional burst of enthusiastic admiration of his country in general, and of this his own special little nook in particular.

Bathed in the cool stream, dined, then retired to our sitting-room; a large open space surrounded by trees. Our ceiling, the glittering heavens; our lamp, the rising moon; our floor, the bare earth—a large log of wood blazed and crackled in the centre, which here in the midst of mountains was enjoyable as to warmth, but had another advantage, for it kept off the night

insects, which are often positive pests, at any rate considerably more than a mere nuisance.

Slept like a top, or, as the French would say, a 'taupe,' of which, by the way, our expression must surely be a corruption. Query, which is anterior to the other, the expression or the toy?

Up at day-break, bathed again in the handy river, swallowed our coffee, and turned our backs on this lovely spot. Morning far from promising, heavy showers, and a long foot journey before us. Our host set us on our path. Bade adieu to him at the foot of the 'Piton de la Rivière noire,'—the highest mountain, by a few feet, in Mauritius. 'Bon voyage, Messieurs,' hats off reciprocally, and out we stepped. We began the ascent about half-past six. Every tree and bush sparkling with the fresh rain-drops. The rain however began to slacken, and did not very much interfere with us the rest of the day. Our Malabars, bag and plaid bearers, looked very glum as they suddenly perceived the no longer to be mistaken direction of our walk. They detest up-hill work in the literal as much as in the metaphorical sense. Our guide was alert and ready, and an intelligent fellow enough, but blest with one of the ugliest faces I ever beheld in my life; the pointed nose and little dark twinkling eyes were strangely like a Lemur or 'Madagascar cat,' though I doubt the cat being flattered; and the

elasticity of his long thin legs and arms added to the resemblance.

It is everything in such an excursion to have a brisk, cheerful, pleasant companion, and this I certainly had in S., letting alone a corresponding enthusiasm with my own for all the beauty we looked upon.

Our path steepish at times, and S. had misgivings, I could see,—indeed he confessed so in the evening,—as to the walking powers of the older man; legs did well enough, breath not quite as good as a few years back. We halted about three-quarters of the way up, and sat down on a small piece of table-land, and revelled in the view towards which we again turned our faces. Three or four gorges converging to a point, their sides densely wooded from where they touched the earth to where they seemed to touch the sky; down at their bases the dark, narrow, serpentine passage, along which the mountain road curved and twisted, looking like a broad black ribbon, and the briskly rushing streams like silver threads woven into it, as a pattern. Massive sombre tufts here and there lying broadly on the lighter shades of green, which must have been the tops of mango trees; the foreground a heap of giant leaves, such as one only sees in the tropics, and each a grand study in itself. Aloes with their bell-clustered, lily-loaded, wand-like stems, sticking up straight or gracefully curv-

ing. The blending colours of a most vivid rainbow were for a few minutes thrown across the whole, and hung over this exquisite landscape like the folds of a transparent drapery of variegated gauze.

Beyond lay the sea, visibly marked by a white line of fretting frothy surge. It was very, very beautiful,—the sea and the peculiar vegetation apart, recalling portions of the Pyrenees, but on a far smaller scale; the exquisitely finished miniature here, the grand easel picture there! One object was wanting, at least so I thought, to render the composition quite faultless,—a palm. Those that have looked on these trees with an artist's eye know the deep poetry there is in them, and more in a single one perhaps, in an extensive view, than in a cluster.

The view on the other side, from the summit of the mountain, about 3000 feet above the sea, could not surpass, I am sure, the one we had already had lower down, but of this we were not allowed to be accurate judges; a small thick rain had now come on, and excepting the huge form of the 'Morne' looming mysteriously through it, we could see nothing but what seemed to me an interminable forest at our feet. Into this we at once plunged; the rain signifying little, for we only got heavy drops through the layers of intertwining branches over head.

The general aspect of one tropical forest is

much the same as another, varied occasionally by a vegetation discovered only on nearer inspection as more peculiarly its own. Nothing can exceed their beauty. A rank luxuriance, a wild unrebuked race of vegetable giants, the tangled festoons of creepers starred with the most brilliant flowers, hanging down like stringed jewels; then the great big orchids. How one smiles afterwards at the pigmy specimens of artificial hot-house culture! One very frequent is like a huge bird's nest, the name in fact of the species, embedded in the forks of the largest trees; yards and yards of 'lianes' are frequently suspended on the gnarled distorted limbs above and about it; such is a faint idea of the picture presented right and left as one breaks one's way through the thickets and makes one's own path through the heart of a primeval forest in the tropics. If you look down there are green depths as it would seem bottomless; if you look up there is roof upon roof of an exquisitely variegated verdure, the tall tree fern piercing through the under and densely tangled vegetation with its umbrella-shaped head waving like a coronet of feathers. At times you see the ghastly bared shape of some tempest-stricken child of the woods stretching across as if to hide its nakedness among the surrounding millions of leafy things. The hope of giving any adequate idea of the witchery of a scene like this is vain. As

I write, I think of Mendellssohn's words in his 'Reisebriefe,' and I thank God that I can fully feel their truth. 'Jeder der das sieht Gott danken muss dass er ihm Sinne gegeben hat, um diese Grösse zu begreifen und aufzufassen.'*

As we got lower and lower and caught a glimpse of the nether world through an occasional gap, we were not sorry to see gleams of sunshine chasing each other over the canes, and when we fairly stepped again on to level ground the sky was bright and blue, and we trudged along with brisk and buoyant step, squeezing out our well-soaked shoes with our feet as we would sponges with our hands.

It had been slippery work, once or twice, under the dripping trees, and I often found the coils of 'lianes' of great service, seizing hold of them as a rope and swinging myself across a ditch or on to a firmer footing at the bottom of a steep slimy bank. It is often dangerous to trust to a branch; the apparently strongest sometimes snaps like a twig.

And so we had passed over the 'Piton de la Rivière Noire,' the highest, but one of the most accessible, of mountain-summits in the islands!

We reached the 'Chamarel' sugar-house soon afterwards, another sad-countenanced dwelling,

* Every man who looks on the like must thank God for having endowed him with sufficient power to grasp and feel the grandeur of what he sees.

I thought, inside and out. Hungry enough, and fully enjoyed a well-earned breakfast offered with open-handed hospitality by Mr B——. After this he escorted us to the much-extolled falls, which I was ungrateful enough to think disappointing, but sufficiently discreet not to own it.

A halt of an hour, and onward. Crossed the end of a gorge, which runs down for a considerable length till it opens on the sea-shore. Scenery gradually of a much bolder character than that of the early morning. Missed our road, which we ended in considering a piece of good luck, as otherwise we should have struck away inland to the left, instead of walking a mile or two along the very edge of the ravine, which we looked down into almost perpendicularly. A hut peeped out here and there on the opposite slopes; the ground surrounding it having been cleared for cultivation, or it would have been difficult to distinguish the building, so completely in most instances had the broad-leaved 'Calebasse' taken possession of roof and sides. The fruit of this bold climber is a gourd; the lower classes dry it and scoop it out, and so turn it to account for all sorts of domestic purposes. One or two of them, in short, are far oftener found in a Creole hut than real cup or pitcher.

Saw frequent single specimens of the

'Raffia.'* The branches of this palm often measure 20 feet or more in length, and are broad in proportion; the tree at a ripe age flowers for the first and only time, then droops and dies. Enormous, long, pendant masses of exceedingly pretty cones, with a natural lacquer like polish on them, cling to it till it falls, but not before one or two self-sown are already springing up to take the place of the parent tree. As we came nearer the sea the beauty of the view only seemed to increase at every step. At our feet there was the deep contracted valley twisting its green way down to the coast; along the edge of the milk-white sands were dark groves of cocoa and banana; and beyond them the line of the coral reef, on which the now drowsy sea was scarcely breaking, just enough to mark its outline, and moving backwards and forwards as a broad silver fringe might flap to and fro on a rich green arras hanging, when agitated by the soft evening breeze.

The crimson sun was gradually sinking, and from the horizon there shot up streaks of deep ruby into the clear sapphire heaven. That sunset I shall never forget. I watched it till the greyer twilight veiled the glory of it, and sat on and on, still gazing, still entranced, as though it were yet there.

A negro fisherman stood a short way off

* Sagus raffia.

smoking at his door, to whom S. went up and had soon arranged to hire his 'pirogue,' a sort of canoe, hollowed roughly out of the trunk of a single tree. We stepped into it, and pushing and punting along, skimmed the shallow transparent green water within the reef, gliding over a very pavement of mosaic, for the tufts of different-coloured coral were perfectly distinct; as also the darting fish which, scared by the punting pole, shot out from one bit and under the next, to find a new hiding-place. We landed a mile or two further on, and soon reached 'Beauchamp,' as usual another tell-tale of altered fortunes. After a walk of some 24 miles we had earned our supper, and could not resist the offer of the servant to set it before us at once, although his master had not yet come in. We were ravenous, and were eating heartily when in Mr —— walked, and cordially welcomed his free and easy guests, but 'cela va sans dire à Maurice!' His own bed too was, in spite of all resistance, given up to me, and never did pillow sustain a sleepier head—and no mosquitoes! or if there were, the curtains were a match for them—not certainly the case the previous night.

Up early the following morning, and out and sat on the shore. The breeze fresh, and the sea breaking strongly on the reef. The untiring little builders of these coral ridges always, seemingly, refuse to work where fresh waters

mingle with the sea; and if so, where the land streams run down, accounting for the usual gaps in the natural rampart, owing to which there is always ingress and egress for boats; and here we have another of the million instances of a provision made by God's providence for man's use and enjoyment.

After breakfast, started in Mr ——'s gig for the pretty little bay of Souillac. Here we got out, sent on our bags together with a bundle of collected ferns to St Aubin, our night's destination, and ourselves struck down on foot straight away to the coast.

The sea was stiller than in the morning; the actual coast, just here, tame enough; one's eyes turned instinctively inland. A belt of the 'Filao,'* a tree common here, and to my mind less ornamental than useful: there is a far more beautiful species at the Cape. These Filaos, planted thickly for the purpose of inviting moisture, run parallel with the sea for miles, and the path between passes along the very edge of the higher ground,—cliff it does not amount to. An isolated fan palm, or the wild rushlike Vacoa,† was growing here and there out of the crumbling and otherwise almost objectless foreground. We passed the valley called 'Bain des Negresses,' a bath not often used I should say, knowing their habits, by its god-mothers. It was ap-

* Casuarina equisetifolia. † Pandanus ensifolius.

parently, like every other, a mass of 'lianes' and ferns. At the point further on where another valley ends, and its own river, 'Rivière des Anguilles,' runs into the sea, we chose a new road and turned our faces inwards, at first following the path at the bottom as far as practicable, then climbing up, and so along the ridge; up and down, obtaining now a close, now a more distant, view of the most lovely scenery. A pretty cascade comes tumbling down between two dark banks. The tropically proportioned leaves of the water-loving 'Songe' massed together in huge patches, and thickets of the 'dark Jamrose,' casting broad shadows over all below them from the upper bank; the tiny stream pushed along, as yet merrily, in its suicidal course towards the sea, gurgling, bubbling, and breaking against lumps of rock and dangling roots washed quite clean, like 'melancholy Jaques,' roots that 'peeped out along the brook which brawled along the wood.' With one ear we took in the triumphant crash of the falling waters of the river, with the other the low monotonous almost plaintive moan of the 'salt sea wave.' The stems and branches of the trees were burnished by the declining sun. On these long wreaths of lianes just waved, and nothing more; occasional patches of grass caught the last rays, but only for a moment, and a beetle 'homeward bound' every now and then whizzed rapidly by us, with that peculiar hum to me so

'musical' so 'melancholy.' The fierce day had gone to rest and gentler evening was stepping down upon earth.

One misses sadly, I must own, the notes of birds throughout these tropical groves. Such sounds are very rare. You have the soft tenor-like cooing of the dove, as we often had to-day, and at times the less agreeable shrill soprano of the parroquite, but far oftener not so much as a chirp. If, however, there be a lack of 'the feathered choir' over-head, one is equally free from 'lurking mischief' under-foot. A snake is, as I have said before, a reptile utterly unknown in the island; and a toad, I am told, except in the shape of a dried specimen or two in the museum, has never been seen. Nor have we wanderers, in our exploring rambles, to dread any of those vegetable exhalations, 'with deadly fragrance rife,' so frequent in other tropical countries. Here you may plunge down fearlessly into every dark depth and leafy hollow, and be perfectly sure that 'there no poisonous adder broods.' Indeed, as to noxious plants, it rather seems to me that every one has some healing property peculiar to itself. I never admired leaf or flower, or talked of a root, but what I was assured the Creole 'Æsculapiæ' consider it infallible for one or other of the corporeal ills man is heir to. Sedatives, correctives, restoratives, panaceæ, in short, are growing at our

sides every step we take, in the shape of simples, if we did but know them.

Arrived after sunset at 'St Aubin,' one of the big houses 'par excellence' of Mauritius. The host and his family were absent, but what signified that, as far as comfort was concerned, in this 'pays de Cocagne;' orders had been left for our reception all the same.

The house has a more imposing look from the road than when you get up to it. On close acquaintance it displays somewhat of the wooden architecture and planky solidity of the stage. There are very good rooms in it, however; one indeed may be called a very fine one, and I quite longed to arrange it less stiffly and make it look as if it were meant to be lived in.

The Sugar Mill is quite close, also the 'Cour.' Eyes and ears we know get quite callous in time to sights and sounds, but, as a wayfarer, just then, I confess I wished myself deafer at day-break.

M—— is a great gardener and makes havoc among the horticultural prizes, but one sadly misses the trim order of an English garden, as one goes through these grounds ever in quest of some rare and carefully cultivated flower, or to marvel at a monster vegetable.

When we got up in the morning, the weather was looking everything we could *not* wish. Certainly it is not in poor England alone that one is

often baulked in one's calculation of a cloudless sky 'to-morrow,' on the eve of an excursion. Of course M. l'Intendant assured us it was most unusual, a species of would-be consolation everywhere invariably given, but ineffectually—to me, at least. However, we had nothing to do but to start, as we did on two ponies, which were to carry us as far as the 'Bois sec.' We were not long before we found ourselves in the middle of a wood, with a genuine forest road running through it, into which the ponies kept plunging knee-deep every three or four yards. But what beauty was before, behind, around, above us! At every step flocks of the gregarious cardinal flew across from tree to tree, from branch to branch, flashing like living gems. Quite suddenly we emerged into a wide open space, the effect of which, to the eye, was most curious and most startling as well. Before us, extending up to the bases of the green hills which rise on two sides of it, lay the famous 'Bois sec,' a wide flat surface of many acres, thickly dotted with the tall, gaunt, ghastly, utterly and entirely denuded stems of hundreds and hundreds of dead forest trees. Some high, some by comparison low, but each and all widely stretching out their scorched-looking, withered limbs. Not a single green tree was to be seen. One might almost have thought one beheld a crowd of giants in the act of raising their bare arms in frantic supplication towards heaven. 'The Cave

of Despair' should have just such a foreground, since 'all about old stocks and stubs of trees, whereon nor fruit nor leaf is ever seen,' or it would afford an admirable landscape for a picture of that 'Sabbat,' which was honoured by the presence of Mephistopheles and his pupil Doctor Faust. Still better, perhaps, would it do for the scene of the witches' rendezvous in Macbeth, for in the 'Bois sec,' if anywhere, I trow,

> 'The weird sisters, hand in hand
> Do go about, about.'

It is one of the most singular spots I have ever beheld in any part of the world, and I only wonder people here do not talk more about it; but how should they? nine out of ten, probably, do not even know it exists. Nature is not, in Mauritius, a common topic of conversation. And as for *art*, there is, I fancy, a much wider knowledge of the *artful*, judging, at least, from a recent trial, which caused no little hubbub. Like other too frequent things of the sort, however, it was nothing more than a nine days' wonder; yet, scandalous enough too, in all conscience, to have lasted ninety.

> Con arte ed inganno
> Si vive mezzo l'anno,
> Con inganno ed arte
> Si vive l'altra parte!

One would think this must have been originally written here by Mr ——.

But I have got too soon out of my wood.

Various are the conjectures as to this peculiar assemblage of dead trees, these phantoms that look as if they had stalked out of an antediluvian forest to congregate by themselves. We were lucky in seeing the 'Bois sec' on a dull, murky, cloudy morning — sunshine would have been far less in harmony with what I may almost call the sublimity of such a spectral landscape. But if exactly within its precincts all savours of death and desolation, there are palpable tokens close at hand of periodical life and merriment.

Just on the skirts is the place of rendezvous of Mr ——'s 'chasse,' of which there were slumbering but very evident signs of jovial doings. There is a long room with a no meanly-sized table running down the middle, flanked by broad shelves, along which, just now, were piled up in dusty repose a vast number of dishes and plates and pots and pans, and above all a very regiment of drinking glasses, rank and file, and ready at a moment's notice for action.

At one of the 'hangars' we left our ponies. S——, on a like excursion a year or two before, had ridden a companion of the two we bestrode to-day, and inquired after it. 'Fin vinny bon homme,' replied the boy, which, being interpreted, means 'too old to work any more,' or, freely translated, has become a stupid old cod-

ger. I give it as a specimen of our elegant vernacular.

Began ascending. Heavy showers off and on, and thick mists; then darting gleams of sunshine; at one moment all the trees once vigorously growing, but now lifeless, sapless blocks, were almost entirely hidden from us, at the next they stood out shimmering as the vapour darted off them.

Our dogs killed a terec, not a bit like a mole in shape, as I had been told, but a complete wild boar in miniature. The savage little beast, with his tiny tusks and bristles up on end, made a good fight at first, but a reinforcement of the enemy came up, and the newly-arrived dog seized him by the throat, and shook his life out in a trice. On halting, our Malabar skinned him, baked him on hot ashes, and seemed to consider him quite a tit bit; the smell to me was rather pig-like.

We had now reached the highest ground, and had just time to take a hasty survey of the extensive view before, or rather behind us, when the rain came down in torrents, lasting, more or less, till sunset. But we certainly could not have seen the 'Bois sec' in weather better adapted to its peculiar features. Something of awe crept over one as skeleton after skeleton was shut out of sight by the wreaths of the increasing mist. It was verily like the covering and uncovering of the lifeless body; it was as if the winding-sheet

enveloped the corpse one moment, and the next was stripped off it. From my memory's eye the 'Bois sec' will never vanish.

'Grand Bassin,' to which we had now come, is one of the marvels of Mauritius. It is nothing more nor less than one of the many still existing craters of extinct volcanoes. The 'Trou aux Cerfs' is another, but that is dry. Here, as the name rather denotes, water fills this natural cup to the brim. It is wooded to the edge, almost the whole circle round. Spite of the rain, we got into a boat and pulled across the diminutive lake. It is unfathomable, of course, and eels that swallow a man at a gulp as they would an oyster, abound. I may as well tell you once for all, that this is a sine quâ non with every very dark-looking pool in Mauritius. I never have seen one without being told so. The soil is formed of lava plainly enough, and through this porous stuff filter innumerable springs into the grand reservoir, and out of it flow some of the principal streams of the island. A mud hut, bedizened with sundry bits of dabbled dripping calico of every sort of colour bespoke an Indian place of pilgrimage. All I could learn about it was that a cock is always sacrificed by the pilgrims, and that the principal rite consists in gormandizing.

Once well into the heart of the forest the wet mattered little, the branches lapped over each other, as they did yesterday, so thickly that the

straight rain was broken in its fall, and the thousands of broad umbrella-like leaves gave us constant shelter. Everything was vividly green and glittering. Here again we found the wild citron in large masses and in full flower, tobacco, tree-ferns, and many kinds of orchids, from the hugest nestling in the rotting forked branches or hollowed trunks of trees, down to a diminutive kind with a bee-like flower, which, as we crushed it with our feet, sent out the most delicious perfume. There is one thing with which an eye hitherto only accustomed to European woods is much struck—the innumerable self-planted trees, which are often of a good size. One of the more delicate of the mimosa tribe, for instance, will constantly be seen growing freely out of the very centre of some stronger tree; many fibres of the root escaping from their narrow bed will hang down and are swayed by the least breath of air.

Parasitical plants of all kinds are exceedingly numerous, and are a very striking and beautiful feature of tropical forests. The force of the word *wilderness* is not really felt until you have wandered in one of them.

We were now in the thickest and most secluded part. We halted for a few minutes to look, wonder, and admire. Not a sound but the pattering rain; everything quite still. There is something at times almost unpleasantly impressive in the universal death-like silence which

reigns on every side. Now and then the chattering of a mob of angry monkeys, whose eyes are on you, though you do not see them, or the screech of a parrot, tells you animal life is near; but even these sounds are rare and as a rule—

Alles ist
Hier still wie ein Geheimniss, wie der Eintritt
In's andre Leben.

Twice however this morning we started a deer, and one fine fellow came bounding so close to me that I could catch the bewildered expression of his full, round eye, as he went crashing through the bushes, and clearing at a spring the decaying trunks and branches of prostrate trees, which hindered his easier escape.

What a delicious draught it all was from that purest of all fountains, nature! How I longed for one or two in the 'far away' home to drink at its source with me! for her now on the wide waters, turning her longing eyes towards our children, and yet backward too, often, I feel and know, and would have so! A selfish wish! and yet it is with her that I have trod many a rough path, and gone through many a tangled thicket in the great forest of life. It is with her that I have learnt the truth of what Schiller tells us—

Getheilte Freude ist doppelt' Freude! *

* Joy shared is double joy.

Ay, and still more, and God bless her for it, that

Getheilter Schmerz ist halber Schmerz.*

We came later in the day, the rain had now ceased, to another very singular spot, 'La Mare aux Vacoas.' It is the most essentially tropically-featured scene I have yet visited. One might call it a pond but for its size. I am told it covers from twenty to thirty acres. With occasional deep holes, it is shallow and muddy, formed, it is supposed, by a natural process of constant drainage of the neighbouring hills. Gold-fish are plentiful, and were to-day swimming about close to the surface. We crossed it at one end on stepping-stones, slippery enough, but we caught hold of the branches over-head, and balanced ourselves, and so kept our footing. There are several varieties † of this oddly-shaped tree. Here a large grove of one species rises up out of the swamp. Another ‡ is planted very extensively throughout the island for the sake of the rushlike leaf, of which the sugar-bags are made. This is one of what botanists name the screw pines.

I scarcely know how to describe it. For the shape, the seven-branched candlestick of the Jews, that boast of Titus sculptured on his Arch

* Suffering shared is the half of suffering.

† Pandanus, humilis, ensifolius, dubius, muricatus.

‡ Pandanus utilis.

in Rome, gives us no bad idea,—indeed the specific name leads me to suppose that my idea is not original. The arm-like branches stick out stiffly and singularly from the stem, and the foliage grows spirally at the ends, like so many great corkscrews.

All about them dangle cones about the size of a baby's head. These look as if they were carved out of solid blocks of wood into an odd denticulated pattern. I have seen something like it in Tunbridge-ware shops,—a puzzle, if I remember, formed of sundry bits of wood, which when once loosened require no little skill to fix them again. The lower extremity of the Vacoa is not less singular in its formation. The stem is supported at its base by a quantity of small, stiff roots, which cling to it like so many prongs of a fork reversed. Several are suspended in the air, not having yet reached the ground, to which they are growing downwards, and where they finally plant themselves, thus becoming additional channels of nourishment to the parent tree.

I would give a good deal to see this 'Mare' by moonlight; there must be something still more *uncanny* in its aspect then, even than in the glare of day. Before long we came to another specimen of tropical vegetation still more fantastic. This is that singular one called the traveller's tree,* familiar to the readers of

* Urania speciosa. Ravenala, leaf of the forest, is the Malagasy name.

Ellis's book on Madagascar, who, as you may recollect, has stamped it on the cover. His description made me curious to see the living plant.

I had already met with single trees, but here we had clumps scattered over a wide open space. It grows like a gigantic flat fan, the lower extremity of the branches, which are in fact one wide leaf, are dovetailed closely, just where they spring from the stem.

I may go to Rome again to give an idea of its strange shape, for in that respect it reminded me of the Pope's peacock-fans, when I have seen His Holiness, rather to his internal discomfort, carried down the nave of St Peter's. The enormous leaves, when they are in motion, flap like the feathers of Mambrino's helmet. But the 'specialité' of this tree gives to it its common name. On boring a hole in the stem, out spirts a good strong stream of fresh water. I have often tasted this water, and excepting that the chill was a little too much off, I found it excellent, and so far I do not agree with Mr Ellis; and yet I was no wayworn thirsty traveller when I drank at this natural forest fountain; had I been I might, I think, have considered it a downright delicious draught. A parched mouth is not over fastidious after a long day's wandering.

Once more rather at fault about our road, making it, we afterwards discovered, longer

than we need have done, but what signifies that when every step unfolds some new beauty. Daylight was fast waning when we found ourselves standing drenched and dripping at the door of Mr ——, a complete stranger to both of us. I need not say it opened instantly and widely. Two more thoroughly soaked travellers never sought hospitality. To keep us in countenance, two friends of Mr ——, as saturated as ourselves, came in, also unexpectedly, five minutes later, and we sat down to supper a party of six; the 'Intendant' silently slipping down into his seat from a side door as the soup was put on the table.

Merry enough, and into the bargain dry once again. Here I had a peep at the daily life of a hard-working young planter, commencing it, I rather fancy, under a somewhat cloudy sky, but struggling manfully, and grappling bravely with difficulties.

Two brothers, one now away, live together in a wretched, dismal, dark, damp nutshell of a house. In such it is that one discovers the magic influence of climate, and the great blessing God bestows on us in a cheerful disposition. Everything here bespoke an out-o'-doors life, and that food and a bed, perhaps not always the last, were all to be looked for within. The bare wooden walls were adorned characteristically, guns, and antlers, and powder-

flasks hanging upon them. Small brown paper packets of garden seeds lay strewed about the floor, and the library seemed to me pretty well restricted to the year's almanac, and a well-thumbed work on manures and soils. The late heavy rains had been testing Mr ——'s habitual cheerfulness, for habitual it is I am sure. All was at a standstill. An ill-built wall had yielded to the continued wet, and lay in stubborn masses on the ground, nor could they get it up again till the sun should lure the Creole mason from his cell like a bee, or more properly speaking like a drone.

Walked over the works in the morning. A scantiness of men and a forced untidiness bespoke, I thought, absence of sufficient capital, if not actual embarrassment. The grounds wind down to the edge of the ravine into which we peeped for the view of one or two pretty falls. A stirrup-cup, in the shape of a 'petit verre de cognac,' and then we took leave of our stalwart bright-eyed young host, brim full of life, hope, and energy, one I am confident to knock difficulty on the head at last. I wish him from my heart success in his struggle, and that he may stand over the prostrate fiend like a second St Michael, for whom he might furnish a painter with a grand model.

Our path lay through canes with a very

strange look of disorder about them, the work, as I learnt later, of monkeys, which hereabouts are very numerous. An hour's walk brought us to ——: hostess absent, but we breakfasted with the 'Intendant.' At a short distance is the best view of the 'Tamarind falls' which are in fact a succession of small ones, nine I think in number, but when looked at from the right point they seem more like a single grand one. Nothing can well be more beautiful than the scenery immediately about them. In one direction the wide gorge opens magnificently to let in a view of the sea with the islands apparently floating on it.

The falls were at their best after so much rain, but for all that here one examines the more curiously of the two, the setting of the gem, than the gem itself. One tangled mass right and left of the rankest tropical vegetation from the summit of the cliff to the bottom of the valley.

Forwards once more, got down from the high ground crossing the plain and up again, and along the ridge of the Tamarind Mountains. These woods seemed to me almost stiller and more devoid of life and sound than any yet. We did for a minute see the figure of a far away pedestrian climbing down with a gun in his hand, and a dead monkey on his shoulder; and now and

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then came hopping about the '*Coq des Bois*,' a mute but lovely little bird of a bluish grey and rich brown plumage. It bent its twinkling eye kindly on the intruders of its solitude. These birds are exceedingly tame, and often perch quietly within reach of one's arm; one to-day flew out of a bush of pink hibiscus profusely in flower, and I thought what a pretty vignette for some drawing-room work on gardening the two together would have made.

We sat down on the brink of the precipice to enjoy the view; very fine it was. The curiously shaped mountain not ill-described by its name, 'les trois Mammelles,' rose just opposite, a green valley of sugar canes lay between, and at our backs frowned the highlands of the Savane, whence we had come, wearing a profoundly sullen look, and probably still, as we had left them, in heavy rain. The weather, notwithstanding that since we had taken leave of Mr —— it had held up, seemed so threatening, that having no longer anything drier than the rather moist clothes on our backs, we determined to cut short our tour by a day. We had soon repented, for on getting down into the plain we found heat and drought, and passed through one or two gardens quite parched up and thirsting for refreshing showers. How readily would our St Michael of the morning have spared a few of his!

We met the carriage unexpectedly at ——, and drove home. I was glad to do this, for trudging along the dusty high road would have been sadly tame work after the wild paths of the last week.

CHAPTER VIII.

INDIANA.

THE Indians, or *Malabars* as we call them indiscriminately here, are a strange people, at times reminding me strongly of the Italians, especially in their vehement gesticulations and volubility. But just as they lack 'the soft music of that southern tongue,' so do they also the Italian cheerfulness and good-humour; and in another point, too, they are dissimilar, for they are the most innately disobliging race I have ever met with.

As one drives along the road one is often treated to a picture which would do very well for the corner of a street in modern Rome, only the group should change their costume a little bit and the faces be a shade less dark, but often really not much more than this. The party here generally consists of an utterly naked child, with some flat silver ornament dangling over its little punchy bare stomach from a thread passed round its waist, patiently squatting on the ground, a brother or sister scarcely less naked standing

up, then comes higher in the child-ladder another boy or girl, then the mother bending over them all, and not uncommonly, to crown the family group, the father as undressed nearly as the baby. All hands, but the tiny pair, are hard at work, each intervening head yielding a full harvest to the eager gleaner. Their respective duties duly performed, the gentleman will seat himself at his wife's feet, where he undergoes the like operation at her hands, after he has unknotted and shaken out his own hair, which falls almost as long and thickly as a woman's, over his sepia shoulders. I have already spoken to you of them in the capacity of servants, but here is a most characteristic trait to amuse you, of which I have just been a witness. One or two in this 'cour' have lately been ill. It is quite marvellous how soon any indisposition, having once entered the 'camp,' assumes an epidemic form. An indoors servant, a youth, suddenly appeared the other morning with the most lack-a-daisical and doleful countenance, and waited at breakfast as you might imagine a sick sloth would. By this demeanour you are always to understand that the individual is 'beaucoup malade.'—'Mamodemuskin'—not the identical boy's own name, but I give it as a sample of a real Indian one, 'Mamodemuskin,' suddenly exclaimed his master, 'I cannot have you ill too, yet awhile. We have company to dinner this week; you must

not have all these dreadful pains till after that. Do you hear?' Mamodemuskin only grinned, but the boy was alert and brisk in a moment without further answer. The day of the dinner came and passed off. Mamodemuskin was quite himself during the whole of that evening, but the next morning the pains and aches returned—he was 'beaucoup malade' to the prescribed minute, and for the prescribed time, then all right again. Now I daresay it will be thought 'how silly to give way to them in this manner!' Come here, and even the most iron will will bend in a month. 'Vouloir c'est pouvoir' elsewhere but not here, on the master's side, most assuredly.'

As labourers, they are far superior to negroes. They are quick when they know their work if they are well looked after. But let the 'Sirdar,' overseer, turn his back for one minute, and there they are squatting on their haunches, their arms crossed, their hands still, but their tongues wagging twenty to the dozen. They are the most inveterate chatterers I ever met with; it is a mere race of words; they never appear to wait for any answer whatever, but to run on for the mere pleasure of hearing their own most unmusical voices. They are naturally indolent; or perhaps I should say, will always be idle when they can, though not to the extent of the Creole blacks. I never saw a better illus-

tration of it than I did one day in town from the windows of my office. I was standing out on the balcony; the scavenger's cart came up the street and halted underneath. Some torn bits of papers, deposited by a former rush of water in the gutter, were sticking on the dried mud; the man gave a languid poke with his brush, which did not move one of them—imagine the force requisite for such a piece of labour—he looked at it, and gave another poke, then shrugged his shoulders and went on a step, performing the same operation, fruitless with few exceptions, all the way up; then there was the indescribable click to the horse, and cart and scavenger moved away, leaving the gutter pretty much as if they had never come; but you should have seen it to enter into the drony listlessness of the man. Can one wonder they are what they are? I am puzzled very often, and do not know if what seems an utter absence of foresight in the commonest occurrence should be set down to stupidity or to a certain degree of malicious pleasure. Every one of us whose duties entail a daily drive into Port Louis, know well the hairbreadth escapes they have, either from the obtuseness of the Malabars you pass on the road, or from their spite; a little of both perhaps. Such a bellowing and belabouring of the poor screeching, tugging beasts which drag the sugar carts, almost always most cruelly overladen, up those

hills! The drivers remain by the side of the wheels, never paying the slightest attention to the leader, who goes just where he likes so far as his traces will let him. A whack from the whip, oftener a blow from a stone thrown at his legs, and round the mule often comes slap in between your horses, or if you are in a low open carriage his nose is on your lap. It is not pleasant if your own team be skittish, as mine was, with a gaping ditch at your side. You get into a rage, brandish your whip, and speak Creole as fluently as you can; the man stares, never gives the slightest indication, even by the expression of his eyes, that he guesses what you are talking about, and saunters on, and when the leader likes he may get back into his place. There is no end of accidents of some sort or other, even on the most unfrequented roads. Next to a muleteer, they tell you in Spain the mule is the most obstinate animal in creation. Malabars and mules in Mauritius have a better claim to the saying.

In 1863 two-thirds of the population were Indians. In 1849 forty-four thousand immigrants from India came into the island, but of later years the importation of Coolies has considerably fallen off, so much so as more than once to have caused serious anxiety to the planters. Slavery was abolished in 1835. The planters were prepared to see ruin before them. Loud were the clamours

against an act of the English Government, which was considered both tyrannical and uncalled for. They would not now have back their slave labour if they could. This change of opinion can be easily understood. One has only, as one drives along, to watch the gangs of convicts working on the roads. Here is forced labour, by the side of yonder labour in the cane-fields which is *paid*. I do not mean to say you often perceive, even in the last, much genuine alacrity, unless it be when the sugar carts are unloading,—that work goes on briskly; but the way in which the men condemned to the roads creep along with their baskets on their heads, and sleepily tilt over the contents at a given spot, at once convinces you on which side the superiority lies. Wheelbarrows have been fruitlessly introduced, for the Malabars could not understand their superiority. It has been calculated that at Portland the prisoners do about 40 per cent. of the quantity of work which would be performed, in the like time, by the like number of free hands. I know not what the proportion may be here, but at the most limited computation it must be something like the above. The Malabar on his arrival contracts with his employer for three or five years' service, the latter paying £2 per head for the first term, and £1 per head for after years. Wages vary from about £1 to £1 4*s*. per month, not including the board or lodging. The board consists of

salt fish, rice, and 'dholl,' a kind of pulse. Skilled labour has of course a higher remuneration. For the wages of household servants there seems to be no better standard than caprice. It is often enough to know a neighbour has a good servant to pay him higher as a decoy. These latter sometimes find their own food, or, as it is called, are 'Secs.' We from the first adopted this *dry* plan, and stuck to it. Imagine being up every morning at day-break apportioning out each article of consumption for house and stable; and yet many of the 'Swells' in Mauritius of both sexes do this every day of their lives. Some idea of the consumption of rice may be formed when I say that at the present moment it is set down at 75,000 bags per month, selling from eight to twelve shillings the bag. This branch of trade is almost exclusively in the hands of the Parsees and Arabs. For such a dose of statistics, however, I shall scarcely be thanked! I have given them, that if read through some idea may be had of the essentially Indian aspect of the labouring portion of our population.

The Malabars are great thieves, thieves on principle. Our servant, a very honest fellow as honesty goes here, one day made a most honestly dishonest confession to A. 'I should never think of taking Madame's money, nor her wine, but a little sugar, or coffee, or rice, or bread, oh! that's quite a different thing.' The cocoa-nut

oil of his mistress is invariably appropriated by the Malabar cook in daily portions for his own frying-pan or his wife's head. Mrs —— told me of one of these unctuous thefts which baffled discovery for a long while. The oil flowed *out* of the *cruse*, but whither? One morning Mr —— spied the man stooping suspiciously low; first casting his eyes behind him. The clue had been found, and under a bush was discovered a reservoir of a good depth scooped out of the earth and brimfull of the cocoa-nut oil!

To watch the women, and men too, caressing and fondling their very young children, one might imagine them the best and the tenderest-hearted parents in the world. But in this, as in many other instances, they seem to follow the instincts of animals rather than to betray the feelings of human beings. As long as the brood is young the mother is devoted to it; she is always fluttering about them, and you see the little things for ever nestling in her bosom. But in a very few years all this is over: the boys cease to be objects of any common affection, and are thrown upon their own resources; and as soon as the girls are of an age to be disposed of, they are considered mere subjects for barter. They are sold, as the mother has been sold before, to the highest bidder. This demoralizing traffic is carried on to a fearful extent, and often leads to the deadliest crimes. You are fre-

quently told how much has been paid for the woman by her husband, or, more properly speaking, the man she is living with, as elsewhere you hear of the price given for a piece of household furniture, as which, in fact, they are more or less looked upon. A woman informed me herself one day, unasked, that she had fetched so much. I forget how much, but I recollect thinking, as I looked at her hideous face, that as far as features went she was very dear at the money! Quite lately we have had a most cruel murder, turning upon the same question. A woman had sold her daughter for a certain sum to one man, and afterwards discovered that by persuading her to leave him for another, she could make a fresh and a better bargain; but the two purchasers were a match for this wretched creature. They came to an understanding, murdered her, rifled the body of the ill-gotten gains, and shared these and the girl too, who was supposed to have connived at the whole thing. They are a cruel people in common ways, especially to their animals. There is no torture they will not inflict upon them, and stand by apparently with delight. I have often thought here it would be pleasant to believe, with some tender-hearted theorists, that there will be a paradise for animals, where Malabars will cease from troubling, and the poor beasts be at rest. I remember one morning being waked by the most

dreadful roaring and screeching—the usual process of pig-sticking, thought I; not a bit—a pig was being killed, but how, think you? by thrusting a notched stick into the stomach and twisting it round till the agonized creature died.

The Malabars are excessively prying and inquisitive, but only on certain points—their neighbours' affairs, for instance,—so far like many of their civilized betters,—and about anything relating, in the most distant degree, to money. My coachman was always gaping at a something or other I had on, or that I was handling. One day I asked him why? He wished out of curiosity just to know how much Monsieur gave for such things!

I do not know if, as men are apt to do, according to one of the 'Guessers of truth,' these people would stare more at a paper kite than a real one, but from ocular demonstration I can say they stare more at a dead dog than a dead man. On the road out of town, one day I saw a considerable crowd collected together, all looking most eagerly at something on the ground. Out of curiosity I drove close up, and discovered they were attentively watching the last agonies of a poor beast, the victim of police vigilance, which lay stretched out, a mass of blood, with three or four dead puppies beside her. Not many days before this the following incident had also come under my own eyes. At the bot-

tom of the garden, of the house I then lived in, ran a stream with a bridge crossing it; on the other side was a fall of the river, some 15 feet, terminating in a smooth, black, pond-like piece of water, where the tumbling river came down and settled more quietly. Here, under the bank where the eddy had carried him, my servant, one morning, told me a man had been discovered drowned. I immediately went down to ascertain if it were true, and, if so, to give notice to the police. I asked a Malabar—a Dobie*—within ten yards of it, where the body was. He did 'not know.' I asked another, two yards off him—he 'believed there,' pointing with a twisted roll of linen he had just wrung out; and there, sure enough, when I had taken not more than a dozen steps further on, I saw a dark bloated heap, which had evidently been carried over the cascade, and was floating on the surface of the water. The men I had spoken to—the only two at work—were not alone; they, and several other 'Dobies,' had been all the morning washing at the river-side, one might almost say within reach of a dead man's body, and had heard it was there, but not one had left his heap of linen, nor had one betrayed the slightest curiosity or interest in the matter. So do they take death as the commonest of daily accidents! To die is nothing; not so to work!

* Washerman.

It has happened, more than once, that a convicted felon has displayed the greatest disappointment at escaping capital punishment, when the alternative has been hard labour. Quite lately a man pleaded guilty to murder, purposely, to avoid all chance of such prolonged misery; but he was baffled. The case was brought in one of aggravated manslaughter, and the man was condemned to twenty years on the roads. As they were led out, a comrade, on finding himself certain of the gallows, crowed over the other, whose sentence was to *live* and labour! A still stronger case happened just before I left Mauritius. A man who had hoped to be hung, was bemoaning his escape to another man, who was at work with him in the prison-court. 'Well,' said the latter, 'go up to that police officer,'—a hatchet was lying near the fellow so advised,—'knock him on the head.' He snatched the hatchet up sooner than he could be observed, and most terribly wounded the officer in the face before the latter could defend himself. I came away without hearing the result, whether the poor policeman died, and his murderer consequently was hung; but, I was told, if the former did recover, he must always be fearfully disfigured. It is said, this recklessness of life has only sprung up since the gallows has superseded the guillotine — the mode of execution, of course, introduced by the French, and which was for some time continued under

an English Government. Will the reason given be guessed? By the English way of despatching him out of this world the criminal arrives in the other a whole man; by the French, maimed and mutilated, being headless, about which unbecoming appearance in Paradise they have a most decided religious scruple.

The Hindoo portion of the Indian population here is sunk into the lowest depths of the very grossest idolatry—gross even for Hindoos. No very high 'caste,' indeed, would, I am told, consent to cross the sea; their voyage entails the transgression of too many strictly enjoined religious observances. Thus, so far it may be said half the missionary's work is done by the time of the arrival of the immigrant; inasmuch as he has learnt to accustom himself to a daily omission of sacred duties; yet the soil is, I fancy, a not overfruitful one. Conversion to Christianity goes on but slowly. Nine times out of ten, I have been assured, it is more nominal than real. Here is a story told me by ——, of a native servant in her father's service in India, who was a professed convert, and I do not doubt it has many a counterpart in Mauritius.

The family were to start the next morning on a long journey, when the man, calling himself a member of the Roman Church, was caught in the act of sacrificing a lamb. 'How is this?' said Gen. ——. 'Sacrificing a lamb! why, you are a

Christian!' 'Well, yes, so I am, but though the blessed Virgin is good, Vishnu is good too, and here we are going a long way, and there are elephants in the jungle, and I thought, if I could please the Virgin and Vishnu as well, we should have a double chance of getting through safely.'

The only time in the course of the whole year that you hear or see much in the way of religious rites, is at the period of the 'Yamseh,' of which I must treat you to an account by itself.

What seems strange, and proves how spurious is the faith our Indians profess, is the fact, that the 'Yamseh' is a Mahometan festival. It answers to the Mohurrum of India. I am told the word 'Yamseh' is supposed to be a corruption of the cry of lamentation and wailing over Hosein, and that it is unknown out of Mauritius.

Few genuine followers of the prophet, however, are ever more than lookers-on, though they have a more private celebration of it themselves. It is the great yearly merry-making, the carnival of the whole population of the place. Christians and Heretics join in it all alike. I have seen it twice, once at Labourdonnais, where it is considered to be held on the grandest scale, once in the middle of an inferior 'Cour,' near the house I was living in; but see it where you will, it is a curious study in more ways than one. The two last days, like those of its more legitimate sister at Rome, are the best, and it is then most generally

attended. For about a fortnight before, however, as soon as the moon rises, the 'tomtom' begins hammering away; and wake when you will, as long as the moon is shining, you will hear the monotonous drumming.

It seems never to flag for a moment, the fresh pair of hands relieving the last almost instantaneously.

But all about this Yamseh in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE YAMSEH.

Now for our description of our Carnival in Mauritius—the Yamseh.

Monsieur —— kindly invited us to his house, which is near Labourdonnais, for the night, and after dinner we started for the fun. On getting out of the carriage we found ourselves on a large open space near the sugar-house. This was densely crowded, men and women, youths and girls, elbowing and hustling each other—all in their holiday suits.

It looked like a moving bed of tulips. The whole was a blaze of light, innumerable torches being brandished and whirled about, while others were flaming from the tops of poles stuck upright in the ground.

Over-head the moon shone out in a perfectly cloudless sky, that 'Casta Diva' called upon, the wide world over, to witness such strange doings:

> 'Quips and cranks and wanton wiles;
> Nods and becks and wreathed smiles.'

And on which she ever looks down so calmly, one might almost say, hypocritically.

We were immediately beset by a posse of shining-green devils, spotted white. They looked as if they had been oiled all over, and dipped in wafers. These were some thirty or forty well-painted lads. Of one of the special duties of the gentleman they represented they certainly acquitted themselves admirably, for they tormented us most unceasingly, until we contrived to get away from them by diving further into the crowd; they then left us, and turned round howling upon some more fresh arrivals. Each held a sort of rattle in both hands, composed of two bits of wood; the clatter of which and the screams of the devils themselves were deafening.

I cannot pretend to give a complete idea of the noise—the shouts of laughter, the unceasing din of discordant voices, the yells, and, what seemed to me like, the bellowing of a thousand bulls! At last, strenuously pushing our way, we got out of the crowd altogether, crossed a purposely-cleared space, and went up some steps into 'the great house.' Bows and curtsies having been made to Monsieur ——, we took our seats on the verandah, from which, at one glance, you saw the whole moving motley crowd—and a chequered harlequin-hued mass it was. Presently the arena before us bristled with combat-

ants, who advanced from opposite sides in pairs, all stripped to the confines of indecency rather than the contrary. These bedaubed and painted heroes brandished their wooden swords and set to with well-acted ferocity. Each encounter, however, after awhile, waxed rather tame. It is thus that they commemorate the fatal field on the plain of Kerbela. 'In and out and round about' prowled the tiger, crawling on all fours and making many a little face shrink back with a look of terror, as he darted with a sudden bound close to any woman who held her child in her arms. Why the king of beasts has been thus metamorphosed I do not know, but in this edition of him we are supposed to behold the lion, which, according to the Mahometan legend, kept faithful watch over the dead body of Hosein. Turning however to Gibbon, at his famous chapter 50, we have the key to the whole of this mummery. Some of the tigers were very well acted, and equally well painted, proving themselves extremely lively and nimble quadrupeds. One particularly made me laugh. He had a tail of many yards length of coloured rope with a succession of tassels, or tufts cut out of paper, fastened all along it. An officer grotesquely dressed in attendance upon the tail held it up with a mock gravity that was quite irresistible. Her Majesty's Mistress of the Robes, on

state occasions, could not have a better pattern of dignified importance when holding up the royal train.

Another buffoon walked at the side, rattling a chain attached to the beast's waist. Among the many feats they treat you to is one, which, when adroitly performed, is pretty enough. A lump of tow, steeped in some inflammable matter, is fastened to the ends of two long sticks held in each hand of the performer, and set suddenly on fire. They are instantly whirled round with marvellous rapidity before, behind, over the head, under the arms, sufficiently near them to scare the lookers-on. As blazing lumps are scattered into the midst of the crowd, numbers jump up, and duck down, and shout, and crouch, and bob, amid roars of laughter.

In short, no contortion of the human body can well be omitted during the Yamseh, accompanied by constant beating and thumping of bare breasts, and still more of the tomtoms. I do not think any one can know what noise really is till he has been an eye-witness of these Indian Saturnalia.

There were one or two finely-limbed men, who tested thews and sinews in wrestling matches. Loud applause followed the victory of one or the discomfiture of the other,—the last often purposed to promote mirth. There was evidently some vanity in the display of their brawny mus-

cular forms. The men were all but wholly uncovered, profusely oiled, and looked like statues of polished chocolate. Generally speaking the men here are small, being, I fancy, for the most part of very inferior castes; but now and then you stumble on a fine specimen of muscular human nature. I once met a young fellow, driving a cart, with nothing on but the scantiest loin-cloth—so really grand in form that but for a very ugly face, he would have done well as a sable companion to the Antinous.

All I have been describing had been going on without once flagging for two or three hours, when a swaying of bodies and a general turning of heads in one direction, announced the moving of the 'Gouhns.' These are light scaffoldings of paper and glass, and counterfeit the catafalque of Hosein's corpse. Their pagoda-shaped base, and cupola top, with the horse-shoe arch, bespeak at once their oriental origin. The different floors rising one out of the other, and narrowing as they go up, are brilliantly illuminated from within. The whole is a mass of the gaudiest colours and most brilliant gilding, and is covered with small flags and every species of fluttering, sparkling, tinkling, indescribably-shaped ornament, cut out of silk, or paper, or tinsel, or tin. A man with a huge sort of stiff banner precedes, looking, not inappropriately, as proud as a peacock. He is accompanied by a host of little

boys who keep dancing round or fanning the sides of the Gouhn, as it moves majestically and steadily along. Then there are the priests, or their representatives, alternately monotonously chanting, screaming, and gesticulating, while the tomtoms are thundering and the spectators clapping their thousand hands. So it creeps on, the crowd now compressed into one close mass gradually backing, as it advances, but not in the least reverentially. It is altogether difficult to fancy it a religious ceremony. And yet I have beheld holy Virgins and blessed Saints stalking through Italian streets quite as ridiculously, almost as indecorously! I did see one woman beating her breasts in a most violent manner, and as if she were in good earnest. She screamed out the same two or three notes, at the highest pitch of her shrill voice, unceasingly, for at least half an hour; all the time her eyes were fixed in a sort of frenzied stare, unless they relaxed their set expression for an instant to fall smilingly on a strapping young fellow in pink calico standing near her. He certainly seemed to come in for at least some portion of her vehement adoration. This procession, I believe, continued to parade about till near break of day. We came away soon after midnight. A little more and I think some of the party would have been bewildered for a week, letting alone deafness from the noise and blindness from the glare of light. In past times

the Gouhn was broken up and thrown into the river the following morning; but a spirit of economy has produced retrenchment here, as on many grand occasions in other places. In these days the most solid and expensive parts are preserved for fresh dressing up at next year's 'Yamseh.' The whole scene is barbaric in the extreme and exceedingly curious.

How one I know would have enjoyed looking at the various groups, and busily plied her pencil! I must try and give a sketch with my pen, though I have given some already. One of the innumerable pictures being long close before me, I had time to study it. It was composed of three women and a man standing together, really as if they had been *postured* in a studio. One woman held a boy of three or four years old. He sat at first astride on her hip, which she bent slightly in order to give him a firm seat—the universal manner of carrying their smaller children.

The boy was a chubby, bright-eyed, merry little fellow; evidently a 'Benjamin' in his family, or perhaps a 'Joseph,' for he wore a loose tiny coat of many colours. It hung down from his round shoulders, just short of what was rounder still, and deeply dimpled. Excepting so much of him as was covered by the sleeveless jacket, he was quite bare; his diminutive fat arms upraised and his legs not less fat hanging down, with

nothing on them but his silver bangles. On his glossy, carefully-combed head was jauntily cocked a quaint sort of cap, cut and trimmed evidently after his mother's own fashion, and composed of bright orange stuff, with a crimson hem and silver lace. The woman was constantly hugging and kissing her darling, and every now and then holding him up exultingly over the heads of those who, standing in front, prevented him from seeing the fun. His mother looked lovingly into his two little responding black diamonds of eyes, while he clapped his small plump hands, and crowed, like a little bantam-cock, in the greatest glee. The woman herself—not ill-featured, tall and graceful—wore a purple silk jacket shot with a darker shade, fitting tightly to her full bust, and edged with silver-lace, of which the 'bit over' had evidently gone to adorn Joseph's sort of cockscomb cap. The rest of her slim figure was enveloped in the folds of a pale-blue muslin, with a broad crimson border. Her two companions were smartly dressed; the one in orange and bright green; the other from head to foot in a striped gauzy kind of material of a colour common here, which is neither scarlet nor crimson, but partaking of both, and one that peculiarly harmonizes with these dark oriental skins; the man was in white muslin, spotless and ample, with a turban of many plaits, of a reddish dappled brown colour striped with gold. All of

them were loaded—legs, feet, hands, arms, throats, ears, and noses—with no end of silver rings and chains, or rows of gold coins; but it is the peculiar privilege of the female sex, pig-like, to pierce and adorn the nostrils.

Any one would have stared at this groupy as long as it will thought I did, to be able to describe it so minutely. They did not talk much, but stood 'bouche beante' gaping at all they saw.

The profusion of gold and silver they wear is extraordinary. I was waited on once at dinner by a servant with a necklace of some thirty or forty sovereigns, and another day by a 'chokerer,' a youth answering exactly to a 'buttons' of English households, whose dress was fastened all down the breast and sleeves with silver 3*d.* pieces —Her Majesty's coin is clipped here tolerably well. It is calculated that from forty to fifty thousand pounds sterling are in this manner withdrawn from circulation. Many of these people prefer hoarding their gains after this fashion, or secretly burying them, to placing their money in the Savings' Bank, although there are considerable and increasing Malabar deposits. A late notorious defalcation, for a while, somewhat strengthened this prejudice; but, of all the people I ever saw, I think they are the fondest of staring at, and gloating over, money. They positively love, like a miser, to look at it for the look alone.

They are drunkards—the women more, I think, than the men—great cowards, and superstitious to a degree scarcely credible. I have a curious instance of the last weakness, which happened but a short time ago, but this I reserve for another chapter. .

CHAPTER X.

SUGAR.

My reader will be surprised perhaps that I have never yet said a word on one subject,—an all-engrossing one here—Sugar, the staple produce of Mauritius, and the only one, at the present day, of any consequence. I waited some time before I saw some of the principal sugar-mills. The description of one will pretty well do for all. They, of course, vary considerably in size, and much depends on the date of introduction of the machinery used,* the superiority of modern invention being incontestable. Again, many mills are better kept than others. One planter has a pride in the smartness of his whole establishment, and bestows upon it a good deal of attention. His next neighbour, perhaps, pays none, or, at any rate, only just as much as is positively necessary and nothing more; but there is often greater order, as far as I could see, and neatness,

* The first boilers sent out to Mauritius were in the ill-fated 'St Géran.' *Vide* chap. III.

indeed cleanliness, in the sugar-house than in the private one.

Sugar is naturally the engrossing subject of thought and the topic 'par excellence' of conversation. Of this, any one who has not resided here can have but a faint idea. Just let us suppose that the mail of to-morrow brought news of the French having at last satisfied a few of our formerly croaking prophets, and announced the safe landing of our opposite neighbours at Dover, with a second edition of the evening papers detailing all the incidents of their march to London; their polite reception by the Lord Mayor at Temple Bar; their fraternization with the 'working-man,' and the establishment of a republic, with Mr Bright as Protector the Second. Well! I verily believe the first question, for all that, would be—'How are sugars?' and only the next—'Did Her Majesty take the Express Train when she retired to Cobourg?' It is difficult to imagine the sensation instantly created by the arrival of a mail with news from the sugar-markets of either hemisphere. The 'Place d'Armes,' the chosen spot of mercantile rendezvous and focus of general gossip, is all hubbub and bustle in five minutes. The dimensions of the faces you meet, in another quarter of an hour, are a pretty good index of the rise or fall in sugars.

On paying a visit to the 'Sucrerie' it is easy to know where you are going, some time before

you arrive: you smell the sugar a mile off the 'Usine.' The very air is impregnated with the saccharine particles. As you get nearer you see long lines of carts creeping along from different directions, and all converging to one point—the mill. You might take them at a distance for so many monster porcupines with their quills up. Each cart is stuck full of spiky canes, which rattle as the wheels go heavily round. As these carts severally come up and halt in succession at a side-door of the mill, the loads are pitched out upon the ground as fast as possible, and away goes the cart again to the cane-field. Having entered the mill, you come abruptly on a flight of steps which lead up to two briskly-revolving cylinders, worked like the rest of the machinery by steam. In some mills there is a water-wheel, and a consequent saving of fuel to a considerable extent; but on such aid no mill should, if possible, depend entirely. Water in Mauritius is often as costly as fuel, and, as yet, less certain. The bundles of canes being tossed over the men's shoulders between the cylinders, they are instantly crushed. The juice ('vesou') thus expressed runs off by a long conduit, and the pulpy refuse falls below. The liquid then glides away over a sort of sieve,—by this the small splinters of cane which have escaped from the iron jaws of the cylinders are caught, somewhat after the fashion of fish, in wicker traps at

a weir. The juice next passes into a large reservoir; out of this, the sediment remaining behind, it flows off into enormous round caldrons solidly embedded in masonry, which are built over subterranean furnaces. These are the boiling pans, and are arranged in succession for the purpose of graduating the heat. Two men are attending to them. One sprinkles the bubbling mass with cold water, or lime and water, and the scum rises. The action here is two-fold; the lime removes or neutralizes the acid, and combining with the gluten of the juice carries it to the bottom. A companion is bending his lanky body to and fro as if he were rowing, although the long wooden tool he handles is in shape more like a rudder than an oar. With this odd-looking instrument he skims off the froth. A third man alternately raises and drops a large ladle, worked on a pivot, and pours the seething contents out of one pan into the next, and so successively, till it comes into the last of the row. Arrived here through the required gradations of heat, it is baled out into a reservoir, from whence it runs down by its own gravity into another and a smaller one. Out of this it is drawn up into the vacuum pan. The vacuum pan is a large copper, globe-shaped apparatus, erected on an elevated sort of small terrace, generally on one side of the sugar-house. Before this valuable invention, out of 18 per cent. of sugar con-

tained in the average quantity of juice, not more than 5 per cent. usually went to market. The greatest care is bestowed upon the vacuum pan by the man whose special duty it is to attend to it. It is kept beautifully clean, and highly polished. A little positive coquetry, even, is at times displayed,—a fresh flower or two, or bunch of green leaves being stuck about it. By balance-weights and stop-cocks the feed is increased or cut off, and so duly regulated. A 'bull's-eye' enables one to see the process of granulation, and by putting an ear to the outside you can judge of the turmoil within, and of the force with which the crystallized particles are dashed against the sides. The man stands by attentively watching the index-needle on a dial. Every now and then he plunges a glass tube through a small separate opening into the hot sugar; this is drawn up full, the man tries the hot stuff with the tip of his forefinger, and thus the degee of consistence is ascertained. The proper one having been reached, a cock is turned, and the cold air rushes in with so loud a noise that you might fancy yourself on the deck of a steamer running along the side of the quay, on which, glancing at the small white basins and whiter faces on every side of you, you thank your stars you are at last to land.

Who in these travelling days does not know that peculiarly welcome sound?

But to return to the vacuum pan. Down now on the instant goes the glutinous mass, rolling steadily and heavily as lava rolls on the sides of Vesuvius, and spreading itself sluggishly over the broad wooden bottom of the cooling vat. From this, when duly ready, it is spaded out, carried off in tin tubs, in shape like foot-baths with huge lips to them, and emptied into the 'turbine.' The turbine is a circular, hollow vessel, lined with a net-work of the finest copper wire. In large sugar-houses, some six or seven of them are ranged on the ground in a row against the walls. Broad straps running in the grooves of a succession of small wheels *above* connect them with the larger wheels *below*, and thus the turbines are worked like lathes. The motion is exceedingly rapid,—the turbines, like so many gigantic children's tops, keep spinning round, and are whirled with the utmost velocity, causing the sugar to fly up against the wire net-work and adhere to it, and so dry by evaporation. It is curious to stand and watch the process. As the wire, now moving so quickly as to be invisible, goes on catching the sugar hurled against it by the rapidly-working machine, the sides become whiter and whiter; and such is its velocity, that the turbine has the appearance of being lined with the glossiest satin.

Sugar was formerly dried in open-bottomed tubs, a process which took from fifteen days to a

month for completion. The same stage in its manufacture is now arrived at in a fewer number of minutes; nor was the saccharine matter one quarter so well obtained by the old plan as by the modern invention of the turbine. The sugar is now made; and having been scraped off with wooden spoons, is carried away and thrown in heaps in the appointed corner: there it remains till it is put into the strong bags which, as I may have already said, are made from the Vacoa Tree; they are smooth, closely plaited, and double. When filled to tightness they are strongly sewed up, and look like so many Brobdignag pincushions of the shape of those our great-grandmothers—dear stitching souls—stuck full of needles, and hung to their waists outside their quilted petticoats.

These puffed-out sugar-bags are next stacked, and await the day of conveyance into town, and consignment to the broker, who bides his time for disposing of the cargo advantageously for his employer, and for pocketing the highest total of per-centage himself.

I need scarcely add that sugar does not undergo the process of refining till it arrives at its destination in Europe. Mr Gladstone can tell us why. The fact of the present more restrictive duties on sugar in England than in France, Australia, and India, is a sore subject here. Lump sugar is consequently somewhat an article of luxury on Creole tables! I confess to a pre-

judice: I could never quite get over having to powder my tea.

A cane may be growing in the morning, and, in the shape of sugar, bagged at night, though not necessarily so. Each bag contains about 150 lbs. The average yield of the Island, for the last three years, has been 135,000 tons. The best quality of sugar goes to Australia; [with the present European restrictions it does not answer to the planter to send a corresponding one to the English market.*

Any syrup that remains from what has gone into the turbines falls into various small gutters, and is carried off to its place of deposit. From this it is drawn out to be re-boiled some three or four times, producing corresponding qualities of sugar. The refuse is allowed to settle down in a kind of well, which is hollowed out underneath, where it remains untouched till all other work inside the mill is concluded. After three or four months' repose a fine grained deposit is occasionally found. It often proves, however, not worth another process of boiling. The liquid is then drawn off for delivery to the distiller.

M——, whose mills seemed to me by far the most complete of all I visited, told me he expected to make three millions of sugar that year;

* In the first five months of 1865 the consumption of unrefined sugar increased 739,637 cwt. as compared with the previous year, and refined sugar 9331 cwt.

and that, although there was less syrup than usual, he reckoned on finding a deposit of about 45,000 lbs. at the end of the 'coupe.' Three millions, according to the actual market prices, would bring in about £26,000 nett.

Something like five hundred men are employed on this estate. The quantity of land under cultivation is about two thousand acres. One-third only of the cane being cut at a time, the ground is allowed to lie fallow for three years after the whole property has yielded three 'coupes' or crops.

All planters are not so provident. From an unwise cupidity, or sometimes from compulsory circumstances, many a goose has been killed for its golden eggs in Mauritius as well as in the fables of Æsop.

The first sugar-cane planted in Mauritius was the white cane of the islands of the Pacific.

About twenty years ago this kind was almost utterly destroyed. There are now about a dozen varieties; all that ever distinguishes them from one another, in my eyes, is the dark purple or light golden-coloured stem. The plant grows to the height of six feet, or more, with a diameter of half an inch, or more. It is knotted at equal distances, or I should perhaps say jointed, after the fashion of another cane—with which we are more familiar—the bamboo. At the top grows a tuft of long rushy leaves, and out of the midst of

them springs the flower. This is feathery, and of a brownish white, resembling that of a great many grasses, only bigger. A small leaf—botanists call it otherwise, I make no doubt—grows at each joint, and when this dries up, the cane is ripe. It is then cut, but only in such quantity, at a time, as can be disposed of, the same day, at the mill. The cane is otherwise almost immediately injured, the sap being dried up rapidly by the sun.

The Malabar gives two strong chops with a small hatchet, one at the root, the other just below the tuft of leaves; the heads are chucked on one side, the canes on the other—the latter ready for carting. The cane-tops, as they are called, are capital green food for the cattle, and, as they are to be had for asking, are an economy too. Horses eat them greedily and thrive on them. We all know sugar has a fattening property. A lump of sugar in her tea is one of the first sacrifices Banting calls on his fair victim to make. No one will be astonished, then, when I say that the boys and girls who during the 'coupe' are munching bits of cane from morning to night, are reputed to be perceptibly plumper at the end of it,—so nutritious is the saccharine juice!

The crushed cane is called 'bagasse.' When brought out from the mill, it is dried, and stacked for fuel. It was believed, till lately, that all

excellence is squeezed out of it as soon as the juice has been extracted. Hence, in Creole, its use to express very much what we do in England by the now all-popular and elegant monosyllable '*bosh*.' 'Ah ça mon cher c'est de la bagasse,' —'All bosh, old fellow!'

But I am told—although having no fires in our houses I have not the opportunity of testing the truth of the assertion—that, by accident, it has been discovered that 'bagasse' has a corresponding virtue with cotton in the matter of wounds from burning. Another property seems quite certain,—it is an antiseptic.*

The cane takes about eighteen months to ripen in the most favourable situation. No ground, as I have said, should ever be allowed to yield more than four crops, at the very utmost, without rest. The land cleared being no longer virgin soil is planted with a shrub, the name of which I forget. After growing to a height of eight or nine feet, its leaves fall, rot, and fertilize. In two or more years the shrub is rooted up, having done its work; and shortly after the field is again fit for planting.

Guano has, of late years, been substituted at a greater actual expense but with a correspondingly greater profit. Planting goes on from October to April. The cane is propagated from slips laid flat in small oblong holes, and for some time the

* Vide Appendix.

fields look like so many cemeteries for babies, with open graves. The cane has three * most formidable enemies, of which more shall be heard in their proper places. There *has been* a fourth, the locusts, but of those one hears little now, since the introduction of that pretty and useful bird, the mina. The rival of the cane, the beet-root, I am told, has but one enemy to contend with, 'les vers gris.' The harvest or *cutting* of the cane 'coupe' takes place from July to January.

A walk through a cane-plantation is not the same thing as a walk through standing corn—that joyous field of golden hope! The canes rise above your head, and shut out all view; but when it is young, and still low, it forms a beautiful feature in the landscape. I have stood on a height and watched the gleams of sunshine run across it, and seen acres and acres of the freshest green vividly sparkling, and gracefully undulating as the soft evening breeze was playing over them. But it is extraordinary how a single day may convert this bright scene into one of black desolation. No transformation can be more complete. I have had some trouble even to recognize my own neighbourhood. When the cane-field is cleared, the straw left upon it is set on fire; the flames, though fierce, are so rapid, from the extreme dryness of the fuel, that they run along without injuring the roots; on the contrary, they

* The rat, the borer, the poublanc.

help, I believe, to promote the speedier growth of the plant, and in a week or so, the ground is fast getting green again.

There! Let my readers think of all this over their next cup of tea! Like Adam Smith's old woman, they will not relish it the less for having learnt all that must happen before they can drop in their lump of sugar.

APPENDIX—BAGASSE.

Extract from a Local Newspaper.—'Attention was called to the antiseptic property of the fibrous residue of the sugar-cane, known under the name of bagasse. This property was accidentally discovered about a year ago by a physician of George-town, who had to perform the post mortem examination of a man found buried under a heap of bagasse. His body, instead of being in an advanced state of decomposition, was dried up to a mummy. The result was that the physician carried into practice his discovery.

'There happened to be at the time a great number of patients suffering from ulcers in the hospital, and a contagious gangrene had declared itself; the physician caused several tubs containing cane-trash to be placed in the wards, and the supply to be renewed at intervals. In a short time the atmosphere of the hospital was purified and the contagion ceased.

'The Editor of the *Standard,* number of the

2nd April, 1864, adds a few remarks which seem applicable to Mauritius, and we think the experiment deserving of a trial in our hospitals.

'Thus, it seems,' says this paper, 'that Nature itself has provided an antidote for the pernicious effects of heat in tropical countries; the contagious disease caught by the heat of the sun may be neutralized by the sugar-cane, which is brought to maturity by those very rays.'

CHAPTER XI.

RANDOM REMINISCENCES.

I WONDER why people find a pleasure in stringing *disagreeables* together when they expressly sit down to talk with us. Mrs —— was here one day soon after our arrival, and gave us such a terrific list of dangers which were to be encountered daily in our new home, that, a little more, and our teeth would have begun to chatter and our hair to stand on end!

'I hope you and Mrs B. are not afraid of lock-jaw; it is very common here. But you must not be cowards about many things in Mauritius. You will get used to it. I have, I do not exactly mean to lock-jaw itself, but to the fright about it.'

'So I should have concluded,' I was going to say, but had no time.

'Hydrophobia, too!'

'Is that common?'

'Oh, very! Cases of it every year! a terrible one the other day, which I fear will terminate

fatally. Poor Madame ——; the children heard her barking as they passed the house!'

'Barking!'

'Oh, yes! they often bark before they die! But you will get used to it. I have.'

Curious about this—to me new—feature in hydrophobia, I took pains to inquire as to the canine propensity of 'poor Madame ——.' She did not *bark* nor die. She is living now. The children may probably have heard some incoherent *talking*. 'Poor Madame ——' is said to be in the habit, like Cassio, of 'putting an enemy into her mouth to steal away her brains,' and it was whispered such a theft had recently been committed, on the occasion so feelingly alluded to by our visitor.

'Of course you continually examine your furniture, Mr B.,' continued our comforter, breaking away from hydrophobia.

'Why?'

'Oh, the white ants—that's all! They eat a chair up in four-and-twenty hours! A friend of mine, M. ——, was obliged to absent himself from home for a week, and on his return, when he went to open his wardrobe, down it came, and might, you know, have killed him!'

'He pulled it over, I suppose?'

'Oh, dear no! the white ants—they had, while he was away, eaten quite through the feet!'

'I wonder it had waited for his arrival t
—an attention, perhaps, on the part of
ants.'

'Ah, you may laugh, but there it is!—they are such cunning little creatures, you often do not know the mischief they have done till you touch the object they have attacked.' There was a little more foundation for the truth here, I have since found, than for the barking.

'I think I saw you coming out of church' —turning from me to A.— 'close to that old negro ——. Take care!'

Before I could again put the question, Why? the lady had anticipated it, and her answer had come.

'He's a leper! Did you not observe his white face?'

'Good gracious!'—getting quite uneasy on my chair,—'Have you white lepers, as well as white ants?'

'Oh, you will get used to them. I have.'

Well! old —— may have been a leper, but I have never heard of another, excepting in the hospital; and I think I could 'get used' to seeing him occasionally quicker than to seeing much of Mrs ——; but of this I have not had the opportunity of judging, for she has gradually dropped us altogether.

One peep at new-comers is often enough!

Called on —— to inquire after her. The black maid said, 'Grand' Madame est un petit morceau mieux.'

What a *Creolism!* I thought to myself, as I gave the servant my card, till it occurred to me she had merely told me, 'Missus was a little bit better.'

How natural it comes to one to criticise disparagingly!

Mrs —— was spending the morning there the next time I went. What a 'grimaciere' that woman is—exactly the description in the Psalms: 'making mouths, and ceasing not!' She announced to me that she and Mr —— were shortly off to Europe. 'It may be for long, or it may be for ever,' as I hear from others; and, whichever of the two, it will be pretty much the same to most of her *friends,* I fancy.

Our grocer's bill came in to-day. Certainly trades in Mauritius are often funnily jumbled together.

6 lbs of cheese.

6 yards of satin ribbon.

3 tins of sardines.

Soap, and a bonnet, and so on.

Here is an advertisement I have copied from a newspaper:—

'Notice to persons attending Balls:—

'Monsieur F. has the honour to inform the public and his clients, that he will keep his hair-dressing room open on all such occasions in the evening.

'Monsieur F. has a fine hunting dog for sale, at a moderate price.'

Imagine a bill from Elise for pickles and point-lace; or from Truefit for pomatum and puppies.

One of the greatest pests in the tropics is the variety of insects that come forth when the 'moon rideth upward.' Our table last night, at dinner, would have done well for a diminutive version of the Enchantment Scene in the 'Freischütz.' No sooner was the lamp put down than every kind of winged monster buzzed about. Not content with flying, some took to swimming in the soup; and one often runs the risk of swallowing a 'rhinoceros beetle.'

The other day, during a stroll in the valley under 'Pieter Both,' I came upon the now neglected temple of an Indian idol. The position chosen was worthy of a holier tutelary saint—a high piece of ground just under the mountain, shaded by mango-trees, and commanding the length and breadth of the green valley.

A rascal, Mr —— told me, had turned a good penny by it for some weeks, and then off! The idol, a mass of painted and gilded clay, cracked and broken, was still there, a most

monstrous divinity! The Brahmins, I am told, maintain that the more hideous the god, the more easily is sin scared from the true believer's heart. One glance here would have been enough to render the deepest-dyed immaculate! What a contrast is such a faith to Christianity—the *essence* of which is love!

The resemblance of the Pieter Both mountain to a statue of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, in her robes and diadem, is really quite extraordinary. Nothing seems wanting but just the last touches of the sculptor's chisel. This is only on one side.

One of ——'s garden-men, who had been ill, gave a sort of thanksgiving fête the other evening on his recovery; the head servant, a strict Hindoo—for this place at least—asked me to come and see it. A kind of 'Salle verte' had been hastily run up with bamboo and aloes. When I went in, it was crowded; in the middle a heap of men squatted together, as if their chins grew out of their knees; their flashing dark eyes running wildly over everything and everybody, but nevertheless keeping up a sort of solemnly-decorous expression; others, on the contrary, were ranged along the walls, and chattered and laughed all the time. At the far end a square heap of mud formed a kind of altar. This was partly covered with a faded cloth, that

had once been bright embroidery, and thickly strewed with rose leaves. Innumerable wax-candles were stuck about it, and blazed and guttered; while others, to replenish them, lay huddled up in a heap with 'Patent' in large letters still on their paper covers. Garlands of some kind of large reeds hung down from the clumsily-constructed roof, the 'tomtom' was going at its usual rate, with an occasional crash of cymbals, and the alternate monotonous chant of two sets of priests, who looked to me about the slyest rogues that well could be. There never was such a confusion of discordant sounds!

The 'Bon Dieu' was not actually represented, but was there, as my friend, who had brought me, assured me, and doubtless he was in the hearts of those who were honest in their intentions.

There was a barbarous wildness in it all, in spite of so much palpable absurdity, that strangely interested me.

People here have the old European scruples of fifty years back with us, as to the length of mourning, no matter what the degree of consanguinity. I never meet M. ——, that he does not apologize for Madame —— never having called on A., although living near, always ending in a lachrymose tone with 'Mais elle est en deuil.' I have seen her, once or twice, out driving, and

one day not apparently overwhelmed with grief, unless laughing be a sign of it. I never can understand such rules. If widows stick diamond pins in their caps, why they had best doff them altogether; and if I lose a dear friend who is not in the slightest degree connected with me by blood, why should I not pay outward respect to his memory, just as well as to a hundredth cousin whom I may have seen only twice in my life?

We went an evening or two ago to ——, 'a few friends, and a little music.' I never was in a place where I heard so much of which I cared to hear so little. Every Miss and Madam in Mauritius is a pianiste 'par excellence.' It is quite extraordinary. If you walk along a street you hear the notes jingling in almost every house, great or small. Occasionally there is taste as well as execution, but generally speaking, it is a kind of firework style here—brilliant and flashy—and that is all; a flourish of fingering, an absence of feeling. The ——s were there, of whom —— whispered in my ear a good story. Mr —— has a favourite recipe for cooling wine. He cuts off the elastic top of a stocking, and stretches it over the neck of the bottle, and keeps it wet. One day a more than usually *swell* dinner was to be given; the wine-coolers, he determined, should be spic and span. Dinner was announced, and down sat the company. Mrs ——, doing the honours

charmingly,—as she always does—casually turns her eyes towards a decanter, which was staring the guest at her side in the face, when—if not 'O tempora!' certainly 'O mores!'—she beheld the tell-tale red marking-cotton, M. B. 3. 12. 1864, Mr —— had filched from his wife's wardrobe in the dark!

A language must necessarily be characteristic of the people that use it. This is particularly the case with our 'patois' here; there is palpable indolence in Creole.

It would be too much trouble to decline, or conjugate, or to have the *distinction* of number or gender—so such grammatical trivialities are dispensed with.

I was amused the other morning, as I sat on my verandah sipping my coffee, by hearing a sentence or two as follows, which I will give as specimens of the language. I must remark that one of the servants had taken it into his head that he wanted a wife, and had obtained permission to go down to Port Louis, and choose one at the Depôt, and bring her up. Such articles of household furniture are always kept ready-made there! The Benedict, got up—for the occasion—in a milky-white turban and lower garments, was listening with the greatest attention.

'Ne pas prendre ça trop Jeun femme,' said his adviser—a nod—'ça faire tapage dans la cour.'

Here came a grunt of entire conviction, 'prendre petit morceau vieux.'

I do not know if the poor fellow thought he had received good advice, but he came back in the evening quite crest-fallen: either the ebony furniture was not fashioned to his taste, or the darkly-fair sex did not find him to theirs. He was so far a very quiet fellow! Speaking of one lady he had seen to ——, he said, 'ça mange trop de riz!'—of another, 'ça a trop d'enfants!'—to whom probably the former remark would have also equally, if not better, applied as well. What is one to expect of them when such are the facts!

The disappointed swain withheld himself from public gaze for a day or two, and was 'beaucoup malade,'—the malady, I fancy, being the fear of ridicule,—after all, a very painful as well as common one, all the world over!

A day or two ago, to Labourdonnais by rail! As yet the Mauritian world is quite a child about its new iron toy! Labourdonnais is *the* show country place of the island; the house is large, with a vast number of detached 'pavillons.' You might fancy yourself in Paris on entering the house. Gilding and silk, bronzes and mirrors; but the chairs and sofas looking as if no one ever sat on them. The grounds, which are perfectly flat and treeless—as far as trees of any size go—with one single exception, are most

beautifully kept, and have an aviary and a 'parc aux Cerfs' literally, not à la Louis XV. That beautiful bird, the New Guinea pigeon,* breeds here; and I saw many of them, with their indescribable diaphanous blue crests, feeding together. Here, for the first time, to know it, I also saw the bread-tree †—a noble tree, when grown to a good size, as I have since beheld it. The large spiky leaves somewhat resemble those of the plane-tree, but are of a richer green; the fruit is round, and rather larger than the cocoa-nut. They say in the East that any man who has planted ten bread-trees has fulfilled his duty to his own and succeeding generations. So M. —— must be easy in his mind on that score.

Shortly before my visit here, I went with Madame —— to Maison d'E——, in Port Louis, the home of her childhood. It was on the eve of passing away from the family whose name it bore, for ever—one of the many instances of decayed fortunes! Here was the Faubourg St Germain in strong contrast to the Chaussee d'Antin-look of Labourdonnais. One might have fancied oneself in one of those charming old 'Salons' where wit was rife and prejudice strong. The gilding, though tarnished, was still rich and beautiful —and the furniture too, though faded and tattered.

* Columba Coronata. † Artocarpus Incisa.

An air of resignation to the changes time had wrought seemed to pervade the house. There was a very respectable-looking woman—a slave in the days when she had laughed, and sung, and nursed Madame —— and others of her family; now she was free, and old, and sad, clinging to the memories of the past, and, apparently, dreading the future of a few days hence. A distant relation, I believe quite blind, was still finding shelter there, and was, perhaps, at least happy in the thought that the profanation going on, on every side, in preparations for a public sale, was so far hidden from her. To poor Madame —— there was a history in every bit of the furniture so soon to be dispersed.

Reverting to hydrophobia, I find there was a very sad case a few years ago, which seems to have left an indelible impression, as well it might, upon many people here.

Colonel T. had a favourite bitch, which had puppies. While he was playing with them one day one of the little creatures snapped at Col. T.'s finger, and bit it. Nothing was thought of this till some time after, when this same puppy showed some disagreeable symptoms, and was killed. Col. T. was advised to have his finger cauterized merely for precaution. From that moment he became thoughtful, and before long, much dispirited. His friends tried to rouse him from his daily increasing depression, and even per-

suaded him to give a ball. What passed in his mind, when all was revelry and mirth about him, who shall say? but I have been told that he played his part but ill. He died a few days after the ball, and about a month after receiving the bite, in the most frightful paroxysms. ——, who told me the story, was with him till nearly the last.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BULL AND THE FROG.

One hears a great deal about the strong antagonistic feeling that still exists between us English and French, in this once wholly French colony. From my own experience I should say that, however slowly, it is wearing out. The old innate mutual feeling of bitter rivalry is, all the world over, getting weaker. Great interests are daily drawing us more closely together; we are associated in the same vast work of civilization. We have lately fought side by side against a common enemy, instead of against each other. We know each other better, individually, and, although John Bull still thinks himself the finest fellow in the world, and, on every possible occasion, makes it known that he does think so, and not always in the most pleasing manner,—nevertheless, reciprocal asperities are gradually softening down.

I think this is the case in Europe; but I am sure it is here.

It is astonishing how much of the genuine

old *politeness* of French manner is still to be found in Mauritius which is certainly less prevalent—I speak generally—than it was thirty years ago in France itself.

If Madame d'Abrantes, at the time of the great peace, considered 'a thorough-bred Englishman the most polished gentleman in the world,' what would she think now?

The old French families in Mauritius still attach great importance to the smaller amenities of social intercourse, which we ourselves are but too apt to consider quite superfluous. I will not enter into the question of John Bull's *blunt honesty*, further than to remark that the *honesty* would be of equal value were the ostentatious *bluntness* left out. A peacock is a far more graceful bird when he does not stick his tail up!

Restricting myself to the narrow limits of this small world, I should say there is no spot on the earth where it is easier for a foreigner to be popular among the French. Naturally enough they cannot quite forget they were once paramount, but as far as my own individual experience goes, nothing can exceed their readiness to treat the interlopers with the greatest courtesy and kindness.

A very efficient and a very popular governor, Sir Robert Farquhar, is said to have declared that, with a ham and a fiddle, he would lead the

whole Creole population over the top of Pieter Both.* And his were testing times. Under his government slavery was abolished, and the cholera first showed itself in the island.

I do not know if it be the same kind of leading that is requisite now; but there is mighty little of the 'fiddle,' and still less of the 'ham.'

Manner has undoubtedly more influence with Frenchmen than with us; in the transaction of business in Mauritius, I should say that a courteous one is a necessity. Mr —— not only says 'No!' but says it almost as if he preferred to say it, when it is a simple case of 'yea' or 'nay.' Flies, an amusing author tells us, are to be caught in greater numbers with molasses than with vinegar: and hence the genuine —— is very popular, and his 'locum tenens' very much the reverse!

Few of the English in official positions speak French really well—many imperfectly—many not at all. Some of them, therefore, conveniently consider it incumbent on them to declare—as I heard —— one day do—that Mauritius, now being an English colony, the French language should be uprooted as quickly as it can be; as if, forsooth, you can ever effectually take out of men's mouths the tongue God has put into them.

* A mountain named—according to tradition—after a Dutchman, the first person who climbed the summit, and as some say, broke his neck for his pains, coming down.

The use of English, as far as feasible, in all public transactions, is, of course, quite another question; but, at any rate, when it does issue from lips of authority, it is as well it should be vernacular. Mr —— is apparently of a contrary opinion, so there is often a suppressed titter among one portion of the gentlemen of the long robe, as I myself witnessed one day in court, and thought it, to say the least, derogatory. As I have said before, we have tried to anglicise all the names of the streets. We may write up 'Royal Street' but it will be called 'Rue Royale' to the last day of its existence. If, however, you ask me whether the delivering over of this colony to-morrow out of the hands of 'Perfide Albion' into those that are so protectingly stretched over the sister-island, Réunion would be a popular act, my answer is that I do not believe there would be found half-a-dozen of the French inhabitants, unless perhaps we look for them among the sprigs of the self-called 'Jeune France,' that, in their hearts, would rejoice at such a transfer.

The French, we all know, are the bravest as well as, on many points, the most sensitive nation in the world. Here they do not forget that we wrenched Mauritius from them, and have kept it. But in these go-a-head, money-loving days, show me the Frenchman in this island who is not proud of his two lines of railroad, his electric telegraph shortly to be, and the gas-lighting of

his hitherto gloomy streets; or who does not proudly contrast these improvements, as well as the life and bustle upon the quais of Port Louis, to the stagnant repose in which St Denis is still slumbering.

The story goes that Bourbon, as the world then called it, was on the point of sharing the fate of the sister-island; and that, if Talleyrand had but condescended to touch-up the geographical knowledge of one of the members of the congress of Vienna, who thought it in a totally different quarter of the world, the twins would never have been torn asunder, but grown on together under the fostering care of an English step-mother. It signifies little to us that such was not the case; but it does a good deal, I think, to Réunion itself. The salary of the French governor is about £2000 per annum; that of ours nearer £8000. Nature is on a larger scale with them than with us, but nothing else; and do what they will, the French portion of English subjects in Mauritius, who find consolation in a grievance, must grumble on at English rule, but prosper under it.

CHAPTER XIII.

SIRENS AND SORCERIES.

'HERE is the story I promised before. It will give an idea how far superstition is still carried by some portion of the inhabitants of Mauritius.

One can scarcely imagine oneself in constant intercourse with people who have implicit belief in such a story, and in hundreds of the same sort. But if we are to credit a quarter of the tales of the Creole gossips alone, we are certainly daily breathing a very 'uncanny' atmosphere.

Mrs —— happening to be up here the other day, asked if our 'Cour' was in the same disturbed state, in which she described her own to be. No one had observed any particular commotion; but on inquiry, I found that the hourly subject of conversation of the wives, or rather mothers, distant as they were from the scene of action, was the story I am going to tell. I ought to state that one of the two lines of railway is carried by an iron viaduct across a very wide ravine, forming the bed of the 'Grande Rivière.'

This work is the present wonder of Mauritius, and one, of which all more particularly concerned in its erection may justly feel proud. The bridge is supported by four successive pairs of columns, placed at equal distances. The width of each span is 125 feet, their height from water-level to rail-level 132 feet. The bridge, at the time of the incident I am going to narrate, was not half finished, the girders had not arrived from England; but the rivetting of the iron plates, of which the tubular columns are composed, was actively proceeding.

It is, however, suddenly observed—to ascertain by whom I found impossible—that the work never really makes any permanent progress. There is an unceasing hammering of bolts all day long, but for all that, the bridge does not advance a bit towards completion. Now it is that half a score of workmen are killed at once—who or how never known; now you hear of the previous day's work being discovered to have fallen to pieces, as sure as the sun rises on the following morning. The workmen are puzzled. One of them, a wide-awake fellow, determines to sit up, and watch, and discover, if he can, the cause of such repeated disaster.

The night chosen for his vigil is beautiful. The moon throws her broad silver light over the whole ravine, and the long shadows of the half-erected columns lie closely upon the ground.

Taking advantage of one of them to conceal himself, the man waits patiently for two or three hours. Nothing happens. All is still. The beams of the moon shimmer on the banks, the shadows seem to sleep along the rugged bottom of the valley. The weary watchman is inclined to follow their example, but at last a sound is heard. A clock heavily tolls out the hour—midnight of course—the only time I imagine the tones of a clock were ever heard here, and for the best reason, for, if any clock there be, it is an imaginary one. At the man's feet lies a small, dark, but tranquil pool of water. At the last stroke of the clock's 'iron-tongue' this pool is suddenly and strangely troubled—the water bubbles up fiercely—the whole surface grows white with foam. Attracted by the noise, the man turns towards it.

Straight from the very centre rises up a tall female form, clad in a glistening robe, fashionably trimmed no doubt, if he could have paid attention to details, with bouquets of sea-weed. Long green hair flows down—not to her heels, having none, but to her tail—and glassy eyes of the same colour glare fixedly at the columns of the bridge. Up to them she solemnly stalks—there is a sound like that of a strong gust of wind. It is a single breath of the 'sirène,' and down tumbles every inch of the work performed in the course of the day just closed. The man

gets hot with consternation, perspires as profusely as he had done earlier in the heat of midday, while hammering at those iron plates, which he now sees lying on the ground again. Fairly frightened out of his wits, he trembles like an aspen leaf, creeps closer within the shadow of his column, and shuts out the dreadful figure from before him by burying his face in his hands.

In vain—there is a long pause, but he knows by instinct that those two glassy green eyes are not, like his own, closed, but on the contrary widely open, and fixed upon him; and so they are, glaring and staring right into his ashy, pale face with an expression of unconcealed rage.

Siren. 'I know why you are here.'

Workman. Not a word in reply, but a shiver from head to foot.

Siren (*stamping her tail*). 'I know why you are here, I say.'

Workman. 'Do you, M'um? I wish I wasn't.'

Siren. 'As you are, you will bear a message to Mr O'M.' (one of the contractor's engineers). 'Tell him this bridge shall never be complete till the siren has received her guerdon.'

Workman. 'Her——, I beg your pardon, Marine Princess, her—what?'

Siren. 'Fool! Her fee; and that in blood! Mark it well!'

Workman. Inwardly ejaculating, 'My own's a-curdling!'

Siren. 'Sucking infants, 5; children of a maturer age, 300; maidens nubile, 80; ladies in an interesting situation, 20; oxen, 11.'

She did not give the total, which I will—406 head of——; how am I to say—'pieces,' perhaps, as we do here at a chasse.

Siren. 'Not till I shall have received these will the bridge proceed!' And with that, souse back into the pool, which—when the man, after a long interval, dares look that way—is as unruffled as if it were mere fancy a siren had ever come up out of it.

I never heard how long it took the man to collect his senses; but with daylight he stood before Mr O'M. Mr O'M.—with laudable but not unusual alacrity — rushes off, as soon as he has washed his face, to the Colonial Secretary. The Colonial Secretary is in bed, but jumps out of it, drinks his cup of coffee hurriedly, and away to the Governor. His Excellency is also in bed, but quits it on the instant, shaves, dresses, drinks his cup of coffee too, and gives his orders. A council is instantly summoned — proceedings of course with closed doors — doubtless the——. Mr —— spoke as long and emphatically as usual, and propounded the letter of the law quite as unerringly; but nothing that then passed within those doors has ever transpired before the public.

On that and many following days, however, a

strange-looking 'Cariole'*—more so even than those commonly to be hired—is met upon the high-roads. It has blood-red wheels, and the driver wears a crimson turban. On the cross bench sit a Chinaman, an Arab, and a Malabar—presidency doubtful. As it rattles by, these three gentlemen grin horribly from ear to ear; and a stifled cry, resembling that of unweaned babies, is distinctly heard to come up from the bottom of the cart. Children from the neighbouring camps are missed by dozens—that seems certain, less so from which camp. After awhile the Cariole is met no more.

It is whispered that the government, with its usual promptitude, has effectually appeased the siren; at any rate the bridge, at the time I write, is nearly finished, all but its painting, and I have myself crossed it twice in a trolly.

Well, all this is a joke for me to write, and for others to read, but very far from one to the poor superstitious Indian women, who for many weeks feared to step out of their 'Camps,' and watched their little children night and day narrowly.

I have since been told in sober earnestness, that the shores of Mauritius are much frequented by sirens; and the mouth of the 'Grande Rivière' especially. Many a pool goes by the name of the 'Sirens' Cave'; and the 'Dobies,' while at their work, are said to often see them, and that to scare

* The public carriage in Mauritius, answering to our 'cab.'

them away they throw soapsuds into their green eyes. This spot I should tell you is the vast wash-tub, with which nature has luckily provided the inhabitants of Port Louis and the suburbs. Such is the story current for some weeks. I joked about it one day with my Indian servant, but I saw at once he considered it far too serious a one to laugh about.

I will add another story which is stranger, because it purports to admit of no doubt. I do not vouch for its truth, but I may as well say that I know some members of the family it is reported to have happened to; and besides this, my friend —— related it to me, and declared he as implicitly believes it, as that he is fully convinced it is in the power of many here to practise sorcery, as of yore.

A young man, a Mahometan, had just married. I do not know whether the bride was an object of persecution from the jealousy of some disappointed swain, but she was certainly exposed to the ill-will of somebody. She had remarkably beautiful hair. It was her boast, her pride, and all the more so that her young bridegroom was also immensely proud of it. Shortly after the wedding she was sitting in a room, but not—mark you—alone. I think the mother was sitting with her, when suddenly the whole mass of her long glossy silken hair fell from her head upon the ground. It had the appearace of having been

cut short off with the sharpest pair of scissors. My friend ——; an English gentleman, saw her head in the state described. She, her husband, and his family are in every way most respectable people. They attributed the loss of the bride's hair at the time, and do still, to sorcery. I have heard several other stories of the sort, corroborative certainly of its existence, but I have chosen to relate this one, because I am personally acquainted with some of the people, and also because —— vouches for the facts as I have related them. My readers can attribute it to what they will.

Charms or 'grisgris' are exceedingly prevalent among the blacks. One scarcely ever sees man, woman, or child without one in some shape or other; so far, not dissimilar to many of the people in European countries—the Italians for instance.

CHAPTER XIV.

PASSING THOUGHTS.

It struck me that if I only just described what I saw pass by while sitting on my verandah one morning, drinking my coffee, it would be amusing.

It is often as good as a magic lantern—so here goes for my first 'slide!'

A man with huge, black, brawny bare legs and arms appears before me voluminously draped in yellow calico,—rolls of crimson muslin tight round his head like a coil of small ropes! He has a bamboo basket slung on his shoulder. One hand holds a long stick, with a silver knob at one end and a spike at the other, much like the staff of a Patriarch in 'Bible cuts.'

As he perceives me, he slides forward as if he intended to fall on his nose. Up goes the disengaged hand to his forehead, and 'Salaam,'—to which I condescendingly nod—with all the dignity of a Bashaw! This is our baker.

Scarcely has he thus saluted me, when another figure comes by. It is our gardener's daughter,

a pretty girl with a quiet melancholy expression of countenance. Looking at her, one would say she is about twelve years old. But she is a bride! On the very threshold of her life of drudgery; and in the hey-day of her trousseau! The folds of her 'caprah' are untumbled, and fresh, and bright-coloured. She balances on her head a round brass vessel—so highly polished she may see her sad face in it—full of water; this utensil the Indians call 'Lotah.' A bundle of leaves and grass is under her arm; and with a string she leads a goat with very full udders, which snaps at any bit of green food hanging within its reach, and the kid ambles along at its mother's heels. The goat and her mistress are met by my coachman going down to the river with the ponies. But the girl never raises her eyes from the ground, as she makes way for the lord of the stable and his beasts. He gives a 'cluck' to *them* and pursues his way, but takes not the slightest notice of her. They are living at present a few yards from each other in our 'Cour,' and this is their first meeting to-day. This indifference to each other is very usual with the Indians. The most common amenities of civilized life often seem wholly wanting among them.

My coachman however has friends, for he comes back before long, chattering and gesticulating with another Malabar, who is vehemently cleaning his teeth. He seems greatly interested

in what he is listening to, which, I wager a good sum, is about money.

But now to shift the slide of my magic lantern!

I start for my office in Town. The first fifty yards of my road is up an avenue of tall, white lilies—just now in full flower — Fleur de lys, Lys Royal, as they still call them here. Alas! for that particular royalty! Its perfume is all that remains of it in the old 'Isle de France,' or indeed elsewhere!

My picture is changed then! The coffee-trees in my garden, and a palm close to the verandah, with a white passion-flower entangling itself everywhere to the best of its power, are succeeded by a front view of the —— 'Magasin,' where M —— drives a very thriving trade. I have survived the dangers of the road *in* myself, as have the springs of my carriage the layers and layers of fresh 'Macadam'—those ever renewed, but nevertheless rough, tokens of the Surveyor-general's regard for us.

I am standing on my balcony in Town, and looking up and down our 'Bond-street,' — the Chaussée. So is Miss ——; so pertinaciously too, as she just steps out of the shop-door—that my curiosity is excited. What! Another glance up and down, and up again! What can it be? Oh, I see: and to do so I confess to stretching half my body over my balcony into the street, much

more than is prudent. Miss —— is carefully studying perspective, and the vanishing point is a red jacket, with a crimson sash obliquely tied across it, disappearing within the jaws of the great gate of the line-barracks. Miss —— seems given to the study of perspective, and professors in that science do not seem to be wanting. Well! the vanishing point is going *in!* What is coming *out* of that gate, and briskly too? Mrs —— in a dog-cart, 'ribbons' in hand, and Mademoiselle —— at her side, and that good fellow —— behind; his chin on his knuckles, and his knuckles on the back of the driver's seat. *Fast-going* that! They are met by two officers in 'Mufti' coming up the street with that indescribable air and step peculiar to military men, and tapping their legs each of them with a slim cane; of course it goes up flourishingly over head in acknowledgment of the dog-cart, and of course the whip of the same vehicle returns the salute in true coachmanlike style; and on the wheels whisk, and you can scarcely distinguish a spoke, and one of the officers jumps an inch or two to the right, as his foot seems in jeopardy, or as he pretends it to be, and he shrugs his shoulder, and in return the charioteer most bewitchingly simulates a shriek!

Two carriages now come into view, close upon each other. An English coronet is painted on the panels of both. One would think heads

adorned with strawberry leaves were common occurrences here to judge by the carriage panels; and where will my reader think they all come from? Democratic America!

There is a dark-complexioned duke, I suppose, lolling with his legs up on the front seat; and there is a sable marchioness with her robes spread out, so as to wipe off the dust from one wheel, if not both. You generally see two women, if driving together, sitting opposite each other, distended to the utmost of their power—it being a peculiarity of this nobility to make known the full width of their petticoats.

Well! I shall look over my balcony no longer, but walk down the street myself.

The first person I meet is young ——, very good-looking, but oh! such a goose. His face belies him.

'His wit invites you, by his looks, to come. But when you knock, it never is at home!'

Two fat Arabs in flowing robes, all over embroidery, jog along in a gig; their glittering turbans are a contrast to the head-dress of that 'Parsee' crossing over. His is the ugliest 'coifure,' I imagine, in the world, both in shape and material — something like a chimney-pot made of pasteboard, and resting obliquely on its chimney! While making these observations I am nearly knocked down by two Chinamen carrying a pig on a pole; the beast's snout is tied

to prevent squeaking, his feet the same to prevent kicking! As I jumped on one side to avoid the pig I nearly tumbled over a sort of tesselated pavement of small cakes lying at the bottom of a brilliantly-painted tin chest. It has 'Temple de delices' on the inside surface of the upraised lid, in gilt letters. This is one of the numerous itinerant 'Tiffius Mauriciens' that are hawked about the streets towards the hungry hour of twelve, and which lure many a young quill-driver from his desk.

A woolly-headed nymph, protecting her black mop from the sun—unnecessary trouble one would think—with a sky-blue silk parasol, is enjoying a cream tartlet immensely, occasionally licking her almost rosy thumb and forefinger. How odd this is! The tips of their fingers on the inside almost always look as if the black had been worn off—not by work, at any rate.

'Per Bacco! che puzzo!' as we exclaim in Classic Rome to this day; my pocket-handkerchief goes to my nose as it were mechanically. I have no need to look up. I know it is there by another sense,—that lugubrious cart painted every inch of it black, and dragged by one horse. I wish I were his worship the mayor for twenty-four hours. That cart should never creep through the streets again in the day-time. It is peculiarly a night-bird, and should have its wings clipped when the sun is up!

I am coming to the 'Company's Gardens' now, and cannot help stopping to look up at the rope-like fibres of the Banyan trees. These trees are enough to remind me I am in a strange land; and the various groups on the benches complete the picture. Some are lolling, some sleeping. Here a haggard-looking woman sits listlessly, with a naked baby sprawling at her feet; here a man is chattering twenty to the dozen, and his fingers fly about so that the listener's eager, onyx-looking eyes seem at times in danger of being snatched out of his head. I have walked on, and here I am, out of Bond-street, in Hyde Park—Champ de Mars.

Many of the *crack* houses, standing in the midst of gardens, are on each side. In one of these I often pass a pleasant hour; a host of agreeable recollections of Mauritius will be connected with its inmates. One is somehow always pleased with oneself after a visit to Mrs ——. One thinks oneself agreeable and made for society, because she is. A remark of a French author I have met with applies so well to this house. Il y a des maisons où l'on a de l'esprit sans s'en douter; d'autres maisons où l'on est bête malgrè soi. The latter is the case, I fear, with most people at ——. What a pity Mrs —— cannot sometimes preside there!

The military band plays here in the evening, and the 'beau monde' drive round and round.

In 1810, when we took Mauritius, there was a single carriage, I am told—the governor's. People went about in palanquins. The present exception to the rule is the family that does not keep a carriage. Well, palanquins might do in the days of slaves,—in these you would have to carry yourself!

CHAPTER XV.

STATE CEREMONIES.

We were near the 'Government,' a chapter or two back, by which we understand Government House. Let me play cicerone, and walk you in! Two of the reception-rooms are large, and might be called fine rooms, if their proportions were better. You would never suppose yourself in the proximity of supremacy from the splendour of the furniture, or its quantity. The English government makes no exception to its shabby rule here.

At this moment, at any rate, the rooms are not bare. It is a levée day! Her Majesty's representative is erect. A smile plays blandly on his features, which is most scrupulously and impartially bestowed upon one and all, as—surrounded by his officials, like Saturn by his satellites—he revolves upon his axis. Lawn sleeves of milky whiteness are at one elbow, flowing robes of violet at the other, both rustling episcopally. Bombazine and black silk hover near confusedly, set off by starched bands—clerical, forensic, and

municipal. A chance naval epaulet glitters, and the more certain aigulets—pendant from resident blue and scarlet shoulders—curl upon them gracefully. Very *civil* and slender swords stick out uncomfortably from yards of oak-leaved gold-lace, abruptly terminating on patent leather boots. All the more dazzling, these, for the sombre background of black 'Bourgeois' suits, which latter gloomier habiliments claim alike the high privilege of being stared at by the momentary itinerant courtiers, who pass through this exclusive room; these black coats, however, do not equally rejoice with the above-named unfleshed weapons in colonial handles to their names!

It is a queer mixture, when you remember it is a Court—a flock of crows and jays, huddled up together.

Hush! H. E. whispers to the Hon. Colonial Secretary, who catches, without much difficulty, the long-since fixedly watchful eye of the A. D. C. The A. D. C. winks to a subordinate, the subordinate winks again to a fellow-subordinate. Like telegrams, winks flash along a line of scarlet and gold wires, ranged with their backs to the walls. At the furthest end of the room, where folding doors suddenly unfold, the message finds the interpreter; the crows cease to caw, the jays to chatter. A crowd of faces—a mass of upturned eyes and noses, stare before

them out of the ante-room, vividly reminding me of the obsoletely famous representation of 'Rocket time at Vauxhall.' There is a little obstreperous pushing at first, akin to the efforts of sheep for entrance into a pen wherein turnips are still growing. Then the scarlet shepherd crooks his finger, at which the sheep, by a retrograde process, morally collapse into lambs, and become orderly and gentle. There is a pretty considerable number of black ones—literal, not metaphorical—among them. They now come into the pen, one by one, with much meekness. Each pokes a card into the shepherd's hand, which hand now passes it on, and the card flutters up the room, till it finally settles between the white-kidded finger and thumb of the A. D. C. The individual thereon designated has, meanwhile, kept time with his card; and as the A. D. C.'s eyes fall upon it, stands himself within the full effulgence of the great luminary. The name is read out. Sometimes pronounced more audibly than correctly, but all the same—what's in a name? Flash after flash of condescension emanates from the centre of light, and the objects of it momentarily, but most scrupulously and equally, illuminated, smirk and bow, slip and slide, and once more disappear through a neighbouring door into their former state of obscurity.

I must make honest declaration that, for self-

possession under such trying circumstances, for ease of deportment, and absence of awkwardness, and 'mauvaise honte,' the courtiers 'au teint café au lait' had often the best of it. We are naturally an awkward race, there is no doubt of it, and the truth came forcibly home to me at the levée in Mauritius. Two gentlemen, who had certainly been born on the other side of the equator, would, if friendly hands had not been near to seize on a coat tail, have gone out less ceremoniously than they came in. An occasional umbrella passed by, and was, I thought, during so august a ceremony, misplaced. Those who walked past, the least dazzled by the brilliancy of Saturn and his satellites, were the Arab merchants; but, then, they had the flowing robes, the imperial gait, and the impassive features of Orientals.

A ball is a more amusing sight, especially that of the 'Birth-day.' Every body is then asked, unless it happens that the A. D. C. particularly forgets one or two he should particularly remember—by mistake, of course. I was often amused at hearing a *somebody* depreciating the mixture, and obtruding the high sense of loyalty, of course known eventually to her Majesty, which rendered the self-sacrifice of going inevitable on his or her part. Now the mixture to me was the real fun, and I said so one day to Madame ——, who was decidedly, in her own

opinion, one of the 'somebodies.' This lady, who, I was told, had been pushed forward along the road of life on a mercantile velocipede, had a most laudable and undisguised itching for practising fine-lady-ism. If the sphere in which to perform were contracted, it was not her fault; and in the mean time she would get ready for a wider, if ever she found herself in it. 'Ah, Monsieur! moi! Je ne m'amuse pas dans des cohues pareilles—je n'y porte jamais,' turning from me to the lady we were mutually visiting, 'qu'une robe des plus ordinaires'—here she complacently glanced at present splendour, and filliped a speck of imaginary dust from out of her satin lap. As to the 'robe ordinaire,' two periods I thought clung to it—there was faded tinsel, but still visible tawdriness.

On the night of a ball, Saturn does not shine alone in the welkin. Venus appears in conjunction. I have known this appearance somewhat late, which, when the inferior constellations have been out and twinkling for some time, is decidedly an ill-advised derangement of the planetary system. The rooms are not altogether 'halls of dazzling light.' The manner of lighting houses here is rather an antiquated one, possibly somewhat like Noah's stable arrangements in the ark. Gas, about to be introduced, will be decidedly an improvement, unless there be nightly explosions. It will take one or two, I should say, to persuade

Creole servants it is worth the trouble to turn the cock, or lock up the gasometer. Who does not know the tin oil-burning lamps which blaze up in butchers' shops, emitting lurid light and thick smoke at the same time, from triple wide-mouthed spouts? Well! such are what we put here into large glass globes, in shape like those in which we often, in England, imprison gold and silver fish. These globes are hung all over the ceiling as thickly as they would be in a warehouse for exhibition or sale.

One of the dancing-rooms is uncomfortably narrow, which is not the best reason for always selecting it as the place of homage. Ladies, huddled together in the lower regions, gaze with longing eyes at the few attainable seats ranged on either side of the sofa at the far end whence Venus shines, when not erratic. These chairs are always eagerly and quickly pounced upon; and I confess that, more than once during my five or six hours of *pleasure*, seeing one suddenly vacant, I would fain have descended on it with a swoop like a hawk. But fortunately for my reputation, a sense of politeness made me draw in my pinions in favour of some tired dove winging her way to it more gently. Before the sofa stretches a small portion of polished 'parquet' purposely kept clear. When I saw the unsteadiness of approaching steps, I thought it would be better if, just here, wax were used more

sparingly by the 'frotteur:' fealty, I reflected, should never appear vacillating nor inclined to falter.

The 'paniers a deux Auses' were, I must say, invariably of British manufacture. One rarely sees anything but an Englishman commit the gaucherie of walking about with a lady on each arm. Many a female-toilette makes its début—if Madame ——'s did not on this occasion —and figures conspicuously through the current season, and one or two more as well. One gets tolerably familiar with a brocaded 'Damas' before it finally disappears—an extra inconvenience to the wearer for the extravagant price she has originally been made to pay for it. But as I have said, the how-much-a-yard is the great point; and one fully discussed on the night which celebrates Her Majesty's birth.

Taste in dress varies here, as in other 'Marble Halls.' I suppose, in her own opinion, one lady looked remarkably well; it was certainly impossible not to remark her. She was very tall and large in proportion,—the upper portion of herself emerged from plaits of dark green, the petticoats, more than ample, were white, the whole seemed rather fitter to be admired on a market-stall than in a drawing-room, for she looked, I thought, like a very fine cauliflower-stalk upwards. I heard the vegetable, however, much praised, so I suppose I was wrong. The men, as a rule, wear

remarkably well-cut clothes, and dandily made, and highly-polished boots; and with them many put on an air, for this occasion, as if it were not the single one of the year, when they basked within the rays of counterfeit royalty. One felt inclined to take poor Theodore Hook's words out of his witty mouth, and say to one or two of these gentlemen, 'I beg your pardon, but may I ask if you are anybody in particular?' Not a quarter so consequential, however, were any of them as Mr ——, who condescendingly gobbled, and stiffly strutted about, like a turkey-cock in ruffles.

Precisely at midnight—as the Port Louis 'Jeames' would have it—the doors of the supper-room are thrown open to the brilliant circle of delighted guests. H. E., after helping Mrs —— to truffled turkey, which high honour she claims tacitly, as a right by precedence, makes an appropriate speech, and amid a buzz of loyal acquiescence in the stereotyped catalogue of our gracious sovereign's virtues, domestic and public, the band strikes up 'the God save,' as our French friends call it. The last night I was at a birthday ball, calumny came,—we will hope uninvited. A coffee-coloured eye was said to have been too unceasingly directed to the spoons; the result, a slight hubbub in the crowd—signs of perturbation on the A. D. C.'s otherwise placid countenance. But I conclude the spoons were immediately counted and found correct, for the supposed

culprit was suddenly persuaded to drown a burst of dark indignation in a tumbler of champagne. I certainly, however, saw plates and plates of detonating bonbons 'go off,' in more ways than one—doubtless for 'le cher petit monde' at home, in bed and asleep I hoped, as I wished most devotedly, by this time, I had been myself.

CHAPTER XVI.

PIEBALD OPINIONS.

THAT we are all men and brethren is exceedingly beautiful in theory, and a highly poetical sentiment; but come into daily contact with the near relations, in whose behalf it was especially promulgated, and I for one confess that the æsthetic element rapidly evaporates. 'Chaque medaille a son revers,' and that famous half-penny-worth of the kneeling descendant of Ham is, if ever medal were yet, two-sided. It was a lucky hit of Wedgwood in the days of clamour for an unwisely precipitate emancipation. It has, perhaps, spread his name more widely through the world, with a certain class, at least, than his appreciation of the perfection of the antique form in his pottery. Sensation is somewhat of a new word just now, but the spurious sort of feeling we are to understand by it, is old enough. In those days, as in these, it was the oil that gave a brisker motion to sluggish wheels, if those whose purpose it was to set them a-going had plenty of it to pour in. Perhaps we sought it more in

exalted aspirations then than we do now. Novels and the drama in these days almost monopolize it.

People who knew no more about the black-man than that he had a black outside, required something else than physical monstrosity to excite their philanthropy, and so they looked at his effigy on Wedgwood's token—which it will be remembered they wore as buttons on their coats and pins in their hair—till they heard the very chains rattle, and saw the tears fall down the black cheeks. He had soon every noble moral quality of the other race, only tenfold, and with none of its vices. He was our 'brother,' and it was altogether wrong that he had not every privilege of the hitherto acknowledged elder one, whether fit for him or not. But, if brothers bear affinity to each other, never was apophthegm less founded on truth. Talk as you like at a distance, and as long as knowledge of them is merely derived from the maudlin reports of missionary magazines, but come and live among negroes, and see if you retain for long your pre-conceived opinions. I have passed some years among them in Africa, and I meet them again here, so at any rate I know something about them; and what do I say of them? it may be asked,—that in my humble opinion, no really unprejudiced man can see 'Africa's swarthy son' daily, and fail to award him an inferior place to that of the white man in the order of

creation. They have never been his equal since the world began, and depend on it they never will be to the end of it. The curse of Canaan rests on them! I am not going to discuss the vexed question why they are what they are; and I will not ask any one to believe the assertion of a scientific writer, that they are the link between man and monkeys. They may possibly think so themselves, for they are fond of telling you that monkeys could originally speak, but, wiser than they, have for ever gone through a process of self-gagging, and have consequently escaped the obligation of work.

But taking a more serious view of the matter, if the races of the world had ever a fair start together, why, may I ask, has the negro stopped where he is? Why, as a people, have they never really and permanently advanced; nor—one may almost say—at any time displayed any real desire to push forward? That they have not done this, materially, is incontestable.

Now, reader, don't throw my book down and exclaim, 'Why, he would have them all slaves again!' Far, far from that! Whether freedom might not have been conferred upon them a great deal more judiciously, if not efficaciously, is at least, I think, a question. But the rivet of their galling chain! that I would have snapped many, many years sooner! All I maintain is, that when periodical bursts of enthusiasm would rank them, as far as

natural endowments, with the whites, enthusiasm is absurdly in error; and that though perfection in their fair-skinned fellow-men will ever be improbable, with them it is impossible.

I am sketching them then as I see them daily. Their contempt for truth is an established fact; their innate love of pilfering proverbial. They will never work one degree more than they must. They are the dirtiest people in the world. You can scarcely enter one of their dwellings here—in which they wallow like pigs, without having to pick your way through some mass of filth and disgusting rubbish. I have seen a hut on the very brink of a ravine. If the inhabitants would have taken the trouble to make only two steps more, everything they were at last compelled to cast away would have gone down some hundred feet; but no! there was the more lazily convenient mound of corruption already established and close at hand, and every future abomination was to be indolently pitched into it. Luckily,—for their apathy would be the same if there were not—they have so scorching a sun over their heads as at times to be doubly purifying.

You rarely set eyes on a woman with African blood in her veins who is not a slattern, unless some grand occasion excites her vanity—church parade, a wedding, or the races above all. The mamma is then decked out to the utmost of her power, and far beyond her means; the daughter

comes forth a bundle of rumpled white muslin, looking like one of the well-known dark dolls over an English rag-shop door. In like manner every negro man you meet is a dawdling heap of dirty tatters. It is said nothing argues high birth like a susceptibility of smell. If so, and that one's servants in Mauritius are not Indians, one's nose should be decidedly plebeian. Of course it will be said the negro cannot help this peculiar gift of nature. True—but why, if God also gives him the river, should he not go into it, just as much, at any rate, as the Indian? Wander by the side of any stream here, early or late, in all weathers, and one is sure to come upon half-a-dozen of the latter washing themselves at the edge of the bank, or plunging con gusto into the deeper water: never do you see a negro doing the same. The Indians here are generally, I should say, as dirty in their domestic habits as the negroes. An Indian hut beats an Irish, if it does not a Creole one; but for the most part the Indians are exceedingly clean in their persons. They are always scrubbing their teeth—an operation in most countries confined to the higher classes. Here you cannot go far along a road, in the morning, without seeing them ramming and twisting a twig of a peach-tree—a hint, by-the-way, for European dentists—between their gums. The negro, however, I will say, has by nature one almost universal good quality. He is, when

left to himself, essentially good-humoured; that he can be lashed into fury akin to a wild beast's, we all know; but, whether it be that like the ploughboy, who 'whistles for want of thought,' they laugh for the same reason—for beyond the hour they have none—or that they are of a more cheerfully organized temperament than others, certain it is that, two or three are never found together, that you may not think the expression will be literally fulfilled, and that their sides will soon 'crack.' I never have seen in my life such genuine hilarity as theirs.

The pure negro race is fast dying out in Mauritius, and a good thing for Mauritius too! It is no longer wanted, and therefore no longer replenished. Immigration from Africa has ceased. The hewer of wood and carrier of water are now almost universally the 'Malabar:' the sluggish heavy-limbed African is not worth his salt by the side of the nimbler Asiatic.

Nothing, when one calls to mind the history of this Island, strikes one more, at the present moment, than the paucity of the actual negro portion of the population.* The labourers and

* I was still more forcibly impressed with this just before I came away. I was anxious to explore the 'Vallée des Piétres,' the spot chosen by Bernadin St Pierre, for the principal scene of this story. I slept under the hospitable roof of Mr ——— over-night, and the next morning crossed the mountain on foot and walked into town. The aspect of the valley, saving that

the far greater part of domestic servants are Indians. The petty trade of the Island is almost exclusively in the hands of the Chinamen. The middling class are white, or Mulatto—the latter race creeping slowly, but surely, step by step up the great social ladder. In their compound nature, both physical and intellectual energy are working themselves out more and more eagerly every fresh generation, and more and more successfully too.

Here, if you like, is the darker race that we shall one day see again hustling out the all white man from the place which he originally seized by the right of might; and so far will the avenger wash out the stains of grievous wrong done to his ancestry on one side. There seems even a just retribution in this.

It is this cross breed, this mottled piebald race that the outstripped 'nigger' affects to utterly despise. M. —— told me that a negro 'pur sang' being twitted one day by a Mulatto with one or two of his physical peculiarities, haughtily replied: 'They tell you of what race I come, at any rate

the larger trees have disappeared, is just as St Pierre describes it; but in my walk, from one end to the other, I met one black man, who was not an Indian: of the last—men, women, and children, dressed in every bright colour, coming up from the plain—there were dozens; adding, I thought, considerably to the picturesqueness of the scenery; but somehow much disturbing my pre-conceived notion of the homes of Paul and Virginia.

could you inform me how I am to know yours?' But there is another portion of the inhabitants who view them with quite as deeply-rooted an aversion—the descendants of the original French settlers. It signifies, however, very little that these still pretend to shut their eyes to the mere possibility of the great change which is inevitable, if not near. It is coming, and will not tarry the longer because they still deny this mixed race. The right to a social position, from which they once seemed to be for ever hopelessly shut out—when *white* meant *master* a thousand times more than it does now, and *black* a thousand times less than *man*. Monsieur de —— and Madame de —— may go on hugging the remembrance of the 'Noblesse Campagnarde' of their mother-country, from which many of the French here sprang. They may peak themselves on their good old aristocratic names, but the motto of the semi-white man is that of the 'Black Douglas,'—'onward,'—and onward steadily are they advancing. They daily buy up the land of the Island from their worn-out, impoverished, ruined, self-styled betters; they are bestowing on their sons and daughters the very best education to be had. They are pushing themselves forward at every given opportunity, and at last it would seem effectually. By a recent appointment, the wedge has been driven into that hitherto exclusive block —the Legislative Council. The only clergyman

who has attempted to give a high tone—and I will not use the word in its restricted sense—to the services of our Church, is a man of colour. Several of the leading barristers are of the same complexion. And if henceforth intelligence is to be a qualification warranting such deviation from the old routine, M. —— will soon cease to be a solitary instance of political justice tardily rendered, and of prejudice finally conquered. It is no great stretch of the imagination, then, to figure to oneself a coffee-coloured Colonial Secretary in possession of the back stairs of Government House, nor a whity-brown chief judge sitting enrobed upon the bench—with so proper a sense too of his own dignity and position as to preclude a repetition of a late scandal; the exhibition of the great limb of the law, not only claiming damages for the 'wear and tear'—1. of mind; 2. of old clothes—but taking his seat in court while the case was arguing.*

The Mulatto, as a race, is well made and well looking; the men are smart in one sense, the women most especially so in another. Nature, certainly, nine times out of ten, furnishes very respectably-shaped blocks for the tailor and milliner to hang their wares on. The female portion

* My Mauritian friends will understand this allusion to a notorious occurrence as ludicrous as improper, the particulars of which, for the principal actor's sake, had best be confined to the narrow sphere in which he moves.

of the class have the universally predominant taste for extravagance in dress, with, perhaps, an additional and potent stimulant—a jealous desire of closely copying, if not out-rivalling, their fairer skinned sisters. The most expensively attired ladies at the races—the grandest opportunity for toilet display we have—are to be found among them. The men, for the most part, have neat figures, are remarkably small-footed, and always very dandily shod. Among the women, a very pretty face is far from uncommon; their eyes are sparkling, their lips no longer of kindred thickness to their negro prototype, and their teeth of course beautifully regular, and of a dazzling white—the one enviable inheritance from the black side; the grand test, the real 'pierre de touche,' is the head. In this, Nature is exceedingly capricious. She seems to have all sorts of whims and a less fixed rule in this than in anything else in the world. You often see the finest, glossiest hair in never-to-be-escaped company, with features where wool would have been nearer in unison; and again you often see just the very reverse. It is amusing to observe the perplexity and the straits to which the unfavoured black *belle* is put to make up for the absence of silken tresses. She cuts and carves the solid lump into the very nearest possible shape of the fashionable 'coiffure' of the day. She brushes, and oils, and twists and twirls, but can never make it anything but

what it is—a monstrous mass, in appearance fitter for the head of a mop, than for the head of a human being.

One trace of a former state of bondage is fast wearing out. I allude to the absurd names formerly given to slaves. Was it a love of the ludicrous, or an innate feeling of contempt, or more—a cruel desire to humiliate, that made the planters of old call them as they did? Whether one or the other, or both—a Jupiter, an Adonis, an Apollo, and Venus, are less common denizens of earth than they used to be, and the Catos and Semiramis's are also gradually disappearing from it altogether. We had a cook—an emancipated slave—the ugliest, dirtiest old fellow eyes ever lighted on, whose name was 'Belle-de-Nuit.' But of all names probably that ever figured on a baptismal register, for so I conclude the following one did, or otherwise there would have been less of legal form in order to get rid of it, commend me to one I heard, but did not, at first, believe could be genuine.* The lady who, not a dozen years ago, obtained the sanction of the law to shed it, is probably still living. The transmutation, to say the least, was a droll one. She laid down that of the ignoble vessel, which, history informs us, Xantippe turned upside down over her husband's head, and substituted that of the Virgin Mary. I tried to ascertain more of 'Josephine

* The reader is here referred to the Appendix.

Marie' *née*.—I have given you to guess what, but without success; but there can be no doubt, I think, that the name she previously bore, and for all I know, by a long descent, must have originated in the heartless freak of some brute of a slave-master.

I have been told that, as a class, the Mulattos are exceedingly corrupt; that, as witnesses in court, perjury is almost openly for the highest bidder; that in the definition of the words right and wrong, they allow themselves, on all subjects, a far wider latitude than the unmixed race. I know not, but if they do, is there not an excuse for them which the others cannot share? Have they not sprung from vice? Was not their very origin a want of principle? During a long series of years no white man thought it in any way incumbent upon him to marry the black mother of his children; and even now, I believe, it is the exception to the rule. Legal proceedings here constantly prove, and lately have done so rather conspicuously, that this tropical Denmark has rottenness in its State. If we are to judge from notorious facts, a successful issue warrants any dishonesty, and a triumphant rogue is a masterpiece and a model. This state of things cannot go on much longer. The day of reckoning will come—nay, is coming, slowly, perhaps, but surely, and the sooner the better, say they who wish well to a country by God so highly favoured—by man,

for long, so systematically degraded. But before any solid improvement can take root, the love of country must, at least, keep pace with the love of money. There must be less of self and less of pelf. Those who come here with empty pockets, and have here filled them, must be content to remain and open them here too. Which of the two races is likely to do this? Is it the one whose sole thought is to make money as quickly as possible, and hurry away in order to spend it in the gayer capitals of Europe? I do not speak of the original colonists, whose fortunes have dwindled down, till, in many instances, there is little else left than poverty, pride, and prejudice; or is it that other race, the tint of whose skin denotes their Southern origin, but tells at the same time of the infusion of a new and invigorating blood. The question surely needs no answer.

I can conceive no responsibility so full of interest as that which would enable those high in office to work out the amelioration of a country so peculiarly — in some respects, so happily — constituted as Mauritius. It is impossible to have lived in it ever so short a time, provided trouble be taken to know it, not to feel the deepest interest in its future. As a country on the world's map, it is a speck; as a colony, it is a pigmy; but it is marvellously gifted by nature,—it has thews and sinews many a bigger place lacks; and Jack, we know, was a

match for the Giant. It should, and it must, be prosperous! And here the fostering care of England for her colonial offspring pre-eminently shines out. Whatever may have been her former faults with regard to her distant possessions, no one can deny that during the last quarter of a century, at least, strides have been made in the right direction. England—although there may be an occasional slip backwards, although many obstacles may stand in the way—wishes in her heart to see these adopted children as free and as prosperous as her very own. Such efforts neither have been, nor are wanting here. Prejudices are beginning to be handled more nicely, and as a natural consequence, they are being more effectually overcome. That there is still a very wide field for improvement, no one, who knows Mauritius, can deny. Good seed, however, has been sown, is sowing, and it is to be hoped each successive harvest will be richer.

APPENDIX—'PIEBALD OPINIONS.'

PROCLAMATION.

In the name of Her Majesty Victoria, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, &c.

His Excellency William Stevenson, Esq., Governor, &c., &c.

Whereas Josephine Pot-de-Chambre, of the district of Grand Port Mauritius, has fulfilled the formalities required by law (ord. Pt. 5 of 1842), for obtaining authority to change her name of Josephine Pot-de-Chambre to Josephine Marie :

And whereas this alteration has not, after three separate public notifications of such intention in the *Government Gazette* of this colony been legally opposed within the time prescribed by law :

Now I, the Governor aforesaid, in virtue of the power in me vested, do hereby order and proclaim as follows :—

The above-named Josephine Pot-de-Chambre shall hereafter bear and be known by the name of Josephine Marie, and such latter names shall henceforth and for ever be her names; in conse-

quence whereof, summary mention of such alteration shall, according to law, when and where required, be made at the demand of any interested party.

Given at Reduit, Mauritius, this tenth day of February, 1859.

By Order,

A. SANDWITH,
Col. Sec.

True copy.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWILIGHT.

'Ahi rimembranza crepusculo del cuor!'

THERE is little here to mark progress of time, and so it slips away almost imperceptibly!

It seems but last night that I was slowly driving up the hill, when, sad at heart, I turned my eyes yet once again back over the sea. Ah! how fresh in my memory it is! There hung the long line of smoke above the wide expanse of water, growing fainter and fainter, till it looked like a distant flock of white sea-birds on the wing, as the 'homeward-bound' ship 'across the restless waters pushed its liquid way,' and I remained behind, with the knowledge that every hour widened the distance between us.

With me day after day has gone, goes still, 'pari passu.' The drive in, lovely, —the green valley below, the not less green mountain at my side, and the blue sea stretching away beyond, till the sky seems to dip into it.

The routine of my day is all the same. The usual office-work commenced and concluded; the

usual number of appointments made, and, Creole fashion, half of them not kept. After that, my horses' heads turned homewards, while, as I get higher and higher up, I drink in fresh life and strength, the atmosphere becoming clearer, and the air fresher at every step. My glass of sherry, or my cup of brandied tea, well-earned after six hours in the stifling town, then the pardonable siesta of a quarter of an hour on the verandah, before the mosquitoes are up and busy, and afterwards my stroll—so pleasant once, so solitary now.

I often find myself sauntering listlessly along, following the old path, as if — were lagging a step or two behind, as if in a minute more we could be chatting cosily together.

Two evenings ago I was sitting, as we have often sat, on the top step of the church porch. How I longed for her to feast her eyes with mine once more on the ineffable beauty of that view. There it was before me! How easily, as she reads this, will she recall it! The mountains on the right—their long jagged edge faintly veiled in a glittering haze,—the ravine curling round their base just now in the full rich crimson glow of sunset. The bananas on the opposite bank catching the reflection on their broad leaves, more like sheets of burnished gold just then than leaves; the aloes fast coming into flower, and

throwing up their stems from spiky thickets, were here and there tipped as if with shining metal. Our favourite palm stood up 'dark against day's golden death.' Every now and then, as the evening breeze stole softly up from the sea, the tuft of feathers waved, and the tall stem seemed bending forwards as if in adoration before the sinking sun, like a Peruvian chief of old inclining his plumed head in the act of worship. That peculiar tint we have together so often watched come and go, was overspreading the western sky. The sun was just sinking into a bed of amber clouds and patches of blood-red, the uppermost tint gradually fading away, and blending at last with a broad sheet of the deepest rose-colour. This in its turn grew fainter, less and less intense, till there was nothing left on the face of the heavens but the very slightest blush. The sea was hushed; not a ripple seemed to be upon it—its smooth glass-like surface utterly undisturbed.

Beautiful as have been the sunsets and twilights, I have watched in other far-away lands, especially in Italy, there have been none that would bear comparison with some I have seen in the tropics. They are briefer than those of Europe, but, in like manner, they are infinitely more exquisite. An indescribable sensation creeps over one, as one stands riveted by the beauty of

the sky. It is as if heaven were getting nearer to us; as if angels were about to step upon earth and hold sweet converse with us sons of men.

How long I sat that time with my elbows on my knees, and my head resting on my hands, my eyes fixed and staring before me, I know not; but the sensation at last became almost painful. It seemed to flash across me suddenly, and more forcibly than ever, how 'far away'—far, far across that slumbering sea were the absent loved ones.

> The hour was come;
> When they that sail along the distant sea
> Languish for home, and they, that in the morn
> Said to sweet friends farewell, melt as at parting.
> * * * *
> When journeying on, the pilgrim
> Slackens his pace, and sighs, and those he loved
> Loves more than ever.

I jumped up, and turned my head as it were mechanically, and looked behind me.

What a scene of ravishing beauty was here also! What another glorious picture painted by God's hand! The moon, nearly at her full, was rising, and as if in purposed contrast to the gilded west, the whole landscape on this side was silvered over. Those strange mountain-peaks in the distance, the 'Pouce' and 'Pieter Both,' stood out, almost white and ghost-like, against the pale blue-grey sky. Close at my side rose, whiter

still, those small twin marble crosses, underneath which sleep the two little cousins—angels now of light—while all that is earthly of them rests here.

Oh! would the two mothers bid them quit that quiet, holy place, and call them back to the turmoil of life, if they could? If God ever took to himself a little child of mine, before my own summons, I should like to know its mortal part might sleep till the all-glorious waking in so fair a spot as this, with those overhanging clusters of white roses, those intertwining wreaths of stephanotis, and that tall, slender lily pointing to the skies. One of the spotless blossoms had just fallen, and lay fresh and unfaded on the ground.

How apt an emblem! *

More than ever that evening did I deplore the unfortunate want of refinement in many of the other tombs. This burying-ground, which might be one of the most beautiful in the world, is strangely disfigured by the absence of common taste. Kindred hands may deck what kindred hearts still cherish, but nothing can prevent the eye being shocked by the barbarous iron railings. Nor is a memorial, on the whole, lately erected

* Since I have left Mauritius two more little ones have been laid to sleep here. No ties of blood bound these two together upon earth, though one claimed kindred with the tenants of the older graves, but in the world above they are sisters.

on a more ambitious scale and in a grander style, very much better. The effect of the lofty white marble cross, unencumbered by a half-polished granite plinth, and half-a-dozen posts threaded together by brass rods, might have been striking for its simplicity—the additions, which have destroyed such simplicity, were strangely ill-advised. Nothing should ever appear to indicate the possibility of sacrilege from trespassing feet. When this is openly guarded against, the sublime poetry of the grave is gone; the hallowed nature of the ground should be its own safeguard, and hence the æsthetic superiority of the simple mound of earth in a village churchyard, with its unsculptured headstone and common flowers.

How more than unsightly, too, the church looked! The site is equalled by few; the building, inside and out, one of the least holy-looking houses of God I have ever met with.

Certainly, when I shall have left Mauritius, I shall neither remember the church itself, nor its services, with any pleasant feeling; nor shall I easily forget the impression received after our attendance on the first Sunday we spent in Mauritius!

CHAPTER XVIII.

RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES.

I HAVE two sights to tell of, which I think will be amusing. One, the 'Fête Dieu,'—at least this version of it is particularly characteristic of the place. I have so often seen this grand ceremony of the Church of Rome in Europe that I somehow hitherto never cared to see it here. It entailed coming all the way into town, and thereby the loss of one of our few holidays at home. The little —— however, in an irresistible manner, begged me to take them to the last, so I drove in, picking them up in my way.

The procession, having been marshalled before the Cathedral doors, proceeded up the street leading to the Champ de Mars, which, as I have said before, is a wide open expanse at the extremity of Port Louis. At the farther end of this ground was erected a high altar, with an artificial avenue of palms leading, for the occasion, straight up to it.

I think in my life I never before saw at once such a collection of hideous people; God forgive

the passing thought, but could such faces, however metamorphosed, ever be those of angels in heaven? These ugly creatures were the black portions of the softer sex. All of them—with the exception of two files of withered crones, who sanctimoniously mumbled their prayers on either side—were veiled, but alas! transparently; and, to boot, crowned with white roses! Never did eyes, I am certain, fall on a more wonderful assemblage of monstrous tumbled vanity. Fancy heads of wool with milk-white wreaths, that looked as if they had been pitched upon them at random, as quoits are before a pothouse door on a village green. Some hundreds of these draped virgins walked along, one after the other, with their great goggle eyes flashing to the right and left. I thought of Sam Slick's well-known nigger clock, with its pendulum eyes. It was a positive relief when these dark shadows passed away, and were succeeded by a bevy of white young ladies, the 'élite' of the rising female generation, who glittered like so many stars in the hitherto dark firmament. Just this one bit of the procession amply repaid the trouble of coming into town. Some of the girls were remarkably pretty, their dresses all quite fresh and well put on, their gossamer veils flowing to their feet, the last encased in the dandiest little satin boots and shoes. They seemed to be entangled in a quantity of fluttering violet-coloured ribbons, intertwined

with garlands of white lilies, which streamed down from the embroidered silk banner, rather ostentatiously carried by one of the pretty devotees. Then came a host of young gentlemen all in black, with kid gloves and patent-leather boots, many of whose eyes, bright as a hawk's, I could see were fixed on the flock of snowy doves that were hovering round the banner.

Finally appeared the poor Bishop, be-mitred and be-stoled, and nearly weighed down by velvet and silk, and fringe and tassels, half-suffocated by clouds of incense, sparkling with episcopal splendour from head to foot, but streaming too; and so purple in the face, that one's instant thought was of apoplexy, as the natural result of this long walk under an extra broiling tropical sun. The day was one of the hottest I have yet felt; the sky speckless and metallic looking.

Amidst all this pomp and frippery, one figure particularly attracted my notice. It was that of a little girl, who walked immediately in front of the 'doves,'—they looked, many of them, as if they thought they were to flutter through life amidst flowers and admiring crowds; but there was a different expression altogether in the face of their leader.

She had evidently been schooled in the part she was to play. There was a little sanctimonious look, which was not always quite scrupulously sustained—that would have been almost impos-

sible, for there was quite a buzz of approbation as she passed along; and then I fancied the happy child peeped out from under the dejected devotee with a little more self-complacency than was quite orthodox for the occasion. She wore a shorter veil than the rest, and her tiny feet were bare, the only pair, as far as I saw, that were; and I thought how scorched and blistered those poor little feet would be before morning. What could be the motive for this unnecessary, if not mock, display of humility? What sad memories could have prompted such mistaken devotions to be imposed on an innocent child?—an offering of a broken heart?—of some Rachel weeping for other children because they are not?—or the accomplished vow of penitence and humility, who knows? perhaps for vows the most sacred, broken in a moment of irresistible temptation, and mourned over for ever!

There were lilliputian angels with coal-black faces, and lily-white wings, and small sable St John's, by the dozens. One poor little fellow, almost smothered in a sheep-skin, his short, fat, naked legs tied, buskin fashion, with scarlet ribbon, could hardly get along on them, and needed constant urging at the hands of a flauntingly-attired schoolmistress, who kept poking him with her sky-blue silk parasol every moment.

If Charles Lamb could have seen that woman strutting along, he would have found the best

illustration in the world of his 'Evangelical Peacock.'

Converts were represented by a long line of dirty, emaciated, wretched-looking Malabars, men and women. The less we inquire into the solidity and strictness of their conversion I imagine the better. Such proofs of the success of Roman Catholic zeal can always be had *cheap* for the occasion. I saw one of our own clergymen there, Mr ——, who, when the host was elevated close to him, stood sternly erect, clothed in a sort of self-complacent stoicism, with his hat doggedly on. I felt inclined to ask him whether it was absolutely necessary he should be there; or whether, if a Jew were to come into his own church with his head covered, he would not order him to bare it, or to go away. I never can understand how purposed insult to a faith not our own can be construed into religious duty; but some of our clerical brotherhood are evidently of a different opinion.

Not long before this celebration of the 'Fête Dieu,' which, by-the-way, the Indians call the *white yamseh*—'yamseh blanc'—I was present at a Chinese religious ceremony.

As I am not up in Confucian divinity, I cannot tell you what god the corpulent brown and gilt gentleman whom I saw set up in the 'Joss house' represented. He looked like a monster edition of those gingerbread idols, bedizened with

gold leaf, more devoutly worshipped by children at a fair, than he seemed to be by any single one of his 'soi-disant' followers. A crowd kept passing to and fro before him, who gaped at him and chattered, and laughed unceasingly.

He was seated upon a sort of elevated half throne, half altar, which was decorated with flowers, and stuck all over with heaps of non-descript tinkling articles, glittering and jingling before, behind, and overhead. Draperies of very rich embroidery, some of which I own I coveted, were festooned about with a good deal of taste, and out of this bower of flowers and bright silks the divinity leered most horribly, with an expression as much as to say, 'you may think I am humbugged, but I am not!'

I never in my life saw any religious ceremony before where there was not the slightest appearance of reverence in any portion of it. The bloated-looking god was dressed up, and raised on high, and that was all. The rest was a constant going and coming of people, who stared at him, and nothing more,—amidst the universal merriment so far of a crowd of perfectly well-conducted people in all other respects.

The essential part of the worship seemed to me to be the eating. This was most scrupulously observed. No worshipper, endowed with but one stomach, could carry devotion farther than some of those did, whom I had plenty of time to

watch. I must confess that a party of Chinamen gormandising is a most sickening sight. It is not easy to say which of the two is the most disgusting to look at,—the eaters, or the things eaten; but for once, such a feast was worth witnessing. Here I first saw chopsticks used. I had fancied that Chinamen were so expert with them that they could pick up their rice grain by grain. Not so; they hold their bowls close to their fat lips, and shovel up the contents with the chopsticks placed close together between two fingers. Any one would do it more or less adroitly after a trial or two. The party I saw on this occasion were collected round a large table, not sitting, but squatting on their haunches, on the tops of chairs or stools,—not a plate was to be seen, but numberless bowls dotted the table, acting the double part of dish and plate. A small short-handled porcelain spoon, such as you sometimes see a thrifty European housewife dole out her bohea with from the tea-chest, lay by the side of each of the *worshippers*.

When the feast began he snatched up one of these spoons, and with his little almond eyes gloating over the greasy, luscious masses, and his mouth opening from ear to ear, dipped now into that bowl, now into this, and fished up some strange-looking fat lump, which he gulped down instantly. I never saw anything edible so nasty in appearance, or to my mind so repulsive, as the

contents of these bowls. Large sea-slugs, for instance—or sea-cucumbers, as they are called; and another dish—I know not what composed it—a kind of blubber and lumps of discoloured suet,—at least so it looked to be; this latter seemed a most popular dish; the small spoons went dipping in incessantly, and the lucky angler smacked his oily lips and licked his greasy fingers when up came the dainty morsel.

A very fat cook, stripped to his waist, with his pigtail twisted out of the way upon his temples, kept running slipshod backwards and forwards between the table and a temporary kitchen. Every instant there were fresh supplies, all hot from the seething, bubbling, spluttering contents of his pots and pans. I had never any idea before how true to nature are those jolly fat-stomached, round-faced, China figures one sees ranged along the counters in the Chinese department of the Baker-street Bazaar. I expected every minute the fat cook would sit down, cross his legs, wag his head, roll his eyes, put out his tongue, and flap his hands. There was a kind of 'aide cuisine,' however, who seemed to be melting fast away entirely; but he brandished his ladle manfully over the charcoal fires, and poured out streams of greasy liquid from one pot to another. He was one of the skinniest men I ever beheld. He looked as if he had been boiled down, like some of his own nasty stuffs, to the

bone. The cook and his 'marmiton,' side by side, were really good examples of their huge ladle entire. The first represented the rotundity of one end of it; the other the lankiness of the long handle.

Nothing could be more obliging than some of the 'swells;' they showed me everything and took me everywhere, and seemed pleased that I wished to see it all. Luckily they offered me the contents of no dish. I could not have stomached that civility.

We drove back by a suburb running down to the sea, passing numberless small human nests embedded in masses of foliage. Several of the cemeteries are situated here; clusters of cocoa trees and other palms wave over those sleeping their last sleep under them. The mountains back this foreground, and altogether it is as pretty and essentially tropical a picture which here rises up before you as one can imagine.

CHAPTER XIX.

'A HUNTING WE WILL GO.'

I AM just come back from a 'Chasse au Cerf,' —three days in the woods, and in the very heart of the woods too! I must give a sketch of it all, while impressions are warm. I shall not do justice to my subject I know: anyhow I should observe I made acquaintance with M. ——, a short time after my arrival in Mauritius. One could not be in so keen a sportsman's company five minutes without hearing of his woods and his deer; and so I received a vague sort of invitation to, some day, pay him a visit during the hunting season. It begins the 15th of May and ends the last day of August. Seeing no more of M. —— for more than a year, I began to fancy that there the invitation might stop, if I did not recall myself to his recollection, so at last I wrote, and said he might expect me. There is nothing in the world a Creole likes better than this sort of off-hand, free and easy self-invitation, and consequently I had the heartiest welcome that could possibly have been given.

For such passing acquaintance, at any rate, commend me to the French! There is no time lost, as so often is the case with us, in the process of thawing the upper crust before you can get at the warmth underneath. 'True Briton,' as I am, I can see across the channel, and I do not think every superiority lies on our side of it. I drove to the spot where we were to find our ponies, previously sent on, with.——, the best fellow in the world, and a pleasant companion to boot. The beasts were standing ready as we trotted up. We jumped out of our carriage and into our saddles, and struck at once into the forest. Our road was rude enough to make the trysting place seem farther off than it really was. An up and down, very rough and crooked path finally brought us there, the ponies having plunged knee-deep in mud the whole way. There had been heavy rain in the morning, and every green thing overhead was dripping.

The Hangar I found to be on a larger scale than I had expected; indeed, in aspect, it is quite a little village. It stands on a cleared space—the forest creeping close up on all four sides. A large flower bed, with a single palm here and there, and a clump of bananas, took somewhat from its otherwise wild look. A long building to the right, the 'salle à manger;' close to this a circular one, the 'rotonde,' for the company while waiting for dinner. The furniture in this consists of a single

bench, a fixture against the wall, and a large high table in the middle, which seemed to be used for a seat too, more than for anything else. The gentlemen lolled on it, dangled their legs from it, and chattered. Beyond this stands the 'abattoir,' furnished with dressers, whereon to cut up the slaughtered game. Innumerable huge hooks, for hanging it, studding the rafters. Round these several detached buildings are grouped a host of small 'cases à deux chambres'—a complete 'camp' in short—into which the guests are distributed by twos and twos as they arrive; and last, not least, the kitchen, pantries, larders, store-rooms, and so forth. Such was the Hangar!

'Welcome to the woods, Monsieur Boyle,' said my host, as he led me to my double-bedded room, separated by a low partition from its exact counterpart, which was to be occupied by MM. ——, whose united good-natured attentions to the 'stranger' I shall never forget. To work with ——, arranging our traps! Guns and leather-leggings are set up against the wall in no time; saddles and hob-nailed shoes pitched into a corner, and flannel shirts and well-worn suits —'Take your oldest clothes,' —— had said in the morning—are soon hanging on sundry big pegs dotted about the mud walls for the purpose. The tiny room ere long looked like a pawnbroker's closet. About eight o'clock we sat down to din-

ner—capital cheer, and plenty of it—the supper-room characteristically adorned with the horned trophies of many a hard day's work. A long table ran along through the middle, at which we mustered some thirty or forty, and, judging from what I soon saw, all pretty well as hungry as myself. Not above four of us were Englishmen. Everything bespoke a case of 'roughing it,' the cuisine excepted. As to that, it would have sustained the reputation of the 'Frères Provençeaux" themselves! The rafters of the roof were bare, and the thatch formed of the 'Vacoa' visible. This was well tested by the heavy rain that fell as we sat under it; not a drop penetrated. I was placed next to my host—a place of honour—as the stranger; and on the other side of me sat M. ——. I was rather amused by the way he addressed me: 'On me dit, Monsieur, que vous causez bien que vous êtes aimable comme un Français!' That I call a two-sided compliment; but that it should be so was the very last intention, I am sure, of my pleasant, good-natured neighbour. About ten we dispersed, stood about in chattering knots, for five minutes or so, and then to our sleeping corners.

My eyes were soon closed, and never re-opened till just before daylight, when a loud yelping from the kennel announced that day was breaking. The dogs, sniffing the morning air, were asking

for their rice, impatient too, I daresay, for the slipping of the leash, and Hoicks! away to the green glades!

Scarcely had the first bark made itself audible when a most pertinaceous cock began to crow with all his might. There was a manifest trial of skill between the two, and I thought the cock had the best of it. I jumped briskly out of bed, being thus warned that some portions of the world around me were stirring,—my friend —— was giving unmistakable signs that he was not. I opened the door and looked about; it seemed that, at any rate, I was the first up on our side of the Hangar. But before many minutes single figures, in every variety of loosely-buttoned and slippered costume, stepped out from the different doors into the twilight. Near neighbours nodded to each other—up went every head, and a rapid glance at the sky, and then one or two shook ominously; the weather had been anxiously discussed the night before and pronounced to look 'fishy.' I may as well say at once the day turned out perfection in spite of these shaking heads. Hasty toilets, neckcloths carelessly knotted, but knicker-bocker-gaiters well-buttoned on; then came the morning cup of coffee, shortly followed by a distribution of slices of meat and bread for the solitary breakfast in the woods, and then to 'muster;' names called over, as we stood in a circle. I felt at school again, and as I answered

almost substituted 'adsum' for 'ici.' Having been counted off we were despatched to our various posts in bands, headed by respective 'piqueurs.'

Some hundred yards on, and we were pursuing our way in a dark, dense, intricate forest. Some of us on ponies, some on foot, all threading our narrow path in single file. Now it wound upwards and across level ground, now down and over a greener sward, passing streams, each of us creeping cautiously along a trunk of a tree thrown across and holding by the branch still on it, or splashing resolutely through the water, often knee-deep, often shallow, now sluggish and clear, now brisk and brawling. Suddenly we found ourselves entering an extensive grove of the travellers' tree.* It is quite impossible to give a correct idea of this fantastically-shaped tree, one of the most singular I imagine in the world. When growing alone, or in a small clump, they strike one as the queerest, quaintest specimens of vegetation it is well possible to imagine; but when, as I did now, you plunge into one vast thicket of it, and of it alone, there is something marvellously grand and imposing. Thousands were growing vigorously, hundreds had fallen over and against each other, many leaned forward broken

* Urania Speciosa. On the subject of this tree the curious reader is referred to 'Ellis's Three Visits to Madagascar,' for a full account.

and tattered, while others measured the ground, and were rotting upon it, in huge disordered heaps of stems and foliage. Our road was the most curious feature of all. It was regularly sliced through, like a narrow cutting of a cliff on a railroad. We passed between impenetrable walls of gigantic interlaced leaves—one cannot say branches—pulpy-looking succulent trunks; the outer side regularly shaven, as it were, clean and flat, no respect for, or thought of, the picturesque. All that had been deemed necessary was to make a broad passage, and as quickly as possible. No part of the tree hung or bent forward, none of the broad leaves waved overhead; the path was hewed solidly out of them. From all this, every now and then, we came suddenly out upon an open glade, across which the sun darted its broad golden streaks, then drew them in again. A mass of black clouds seemed to be still struggling to imprison it. Mountains backed the landscape—the higher ridge gloomily veiled in mist. Once for a fore-ground we came upon a herd of deer browsing; up went their antlers quivering, as our approaching steps disturbed them, and away they bounded! I longed for one or two now 'far away' to revel with me in all this glorious scenery, so utterly strange and new, so wondrously beautiful. After awhile we lost sight altogether of the travellers' tree; the landscape completely changed. We dived down into a

gorge, crossed another stream, and up again. Nothing now seemed to enclose us but a black wilderness of Jamrose.* Against these dark walls the wild citron tree, just now loaded with fruit, stood out in the richest and most lovely contrast; some of them must have been twenty feet high, a mass of vividly-polished green leaves, and burnished golden fruit. Verily I seemed to be wending my way through the gardens of the Hesperides!

All this time the various parties of 'chasseurs,' who were on foot, walked along in one long line, merrily and briskly, some shouldering their own guns, humming a tune or whistling, some followed by Malabars loaded with rough coats, camp-stools, baskets, sticks, and so forth; and several carrying, to boot, their masters' rifles. We now came to the banks of another broadish stream, and dismounting, left our ponies with the grooms, whom we found standing about all ready to receive them; a jump from stone to stone or a plunge into the hurrying water, and up the steepish bank, and we were again in quite a new kind of scenery. Here there had been extensive clearing, the higher ground much opened, the forest swept away. It was less tropical, more like our tamer—though in their own style not less lovely—woodlands; the fern grew high, the grass was rank and long; there were brakes, and

* Jambosa vulgaris.

if not actually briars and brambles, no mean—and a beautiful substitute too—for them in the shape of immense thickets of a species of wild raspberry, often presenting a most formidable barrier to wandering feet: this plant, a delight to the eye, with its hirsute, prickly, vine-shaped leaves and scarlet berries, with a most refreshing acid, runs riot through every wood in the island; and unless speedy measures be taken to effectually check it, bids fair to choke every other green thing that grows low, if not to prevent any human creature walking freely two or three yards together.

Hist! 'silence, Messieurs!' in a commanding whisper. The hum of voices ceased; not a sound but of cautious tramping of stealthy feet: instantly do we all look forward! And yonder truly is a picture of beauty! Right in front of us, very close at hand, their ears erect, their heads towering grandly, their antlers bristling through the underwood, were collected together a fine herd of deer, twice the number of the one we had seen already: we had disturbed them, and they were instantly on the alert. We made a circuit successfully to get out of their sight, and presently we beheld one after the other, no longer alarmed, bounding gently across and disappearing down into the leafy distance: little knew they—those noble beasts—that their murderers watched and tracked them!

I must tell you, we had for some way dropped, one by one, many of our comrades, who remained behind at their different *posts*. Presently the 'piqueur' made signs to me, and the others went on without me. A curious-looking object enough it was, at the foot of which I and my attendant Malabar were ordered in our turn to halt. A dead tree, quite branchless, tall and straight, stood by itself, surmounted by what had the appearance of a huge solid, cinder-like sponge. It was a nest of that destructive little creature, the white ant. One might have imagined oneself staring at the withered stump of a limb of some giant's corpse that was rebelliously sticking up out of its grave.

At the foot of this spectre I made my début at a 'chasse au cerf.' I may as well own at once, it was far from a distinguished one. Perhaps I did wound one fine fellow, but here even I am very doubtful; at any rate not mortally, and I certainly did not bag my game. Perhaps I was too eager, as all novices are; but more unlikely culpably inattentive. I had yet to learn how absolutely necessary it would be for one's reputation to be able to boast a little, with some foundation of truth, at the supper table. Yes! I must candidly confess that my thoughts wandered widely from my gun. My eye was for ever roving, taking greedily in all the varied beauty of the exquisite scenery stretched out on every

side before me. I thought more of this than the game in it. One magnificent stag came close to me—standing at full gaze, his large round speaking eye bent, inquiringly, right on me. The motion of my arm, before I had quite raised my gun, was enough. Off he sprang, and by the time I fired he was plunging down into the hollow at my back, crashing through bush and brake till each closed over him, and I could only trace him by a distant undulation of the masses of interwinding leaves. I re-loaded and cocked, and stood quite excited, my eyes fixed steadily on one spot, but nothing came. The distant echo of a discharged gun or two made me believe the game had now taken quite another direction, so I rested my own against the tree, and took out my breakfast, which by this time I was ready for, and which I ate with a very tolerable appetite.

I wish some I know could have seen me just then; a few yards in advance was a thicket of dark jamrose, behind me a small ravine choking with its gloriously rank vegetation. Over this rose up the misty peaks of purple mountains. Just above, on the withered tree sat a bright little green parrot, which had suddenly come and perched there, and was drying and pluming himself, and fluttering his feathers, which glittered in the occasional gleams of sunshine. My Malabar was squatting on the ground, munching his bread and meat,

like his temporary master. A white turban was bound round his head, and his dark, naked legs tucked up, Indian fashion, under him. Off and on a distant shot, now followed quickly by a second, and a third, told me some noble beast out beyond was running the gauntlet of the posted guns; there was a loud yelping and barking continually from below. The dogs were at the bottom of the gorge, and driving the herd we had driven down up again. I was just raising my flask to my lips, when I heard a sound of scampering, hurried feet on the turf. I turned—a dozen or more of panic-stricken deer passed rapidly across the bit of open ground. I was glad I could not see a single buck among them, although maybe he would have been really no worse for my firing. Scarcely were they out of sight when there was a shrill piercing cry—the wail of a poor fawn following in the track of its mother. So overcome was she by fear, that she had left her young one behind and was flying from it for safety.

How intensely poetical it was!

So passed my first day in the forest.

Those who had composed our own particular band got back to the 'Hangar' early. I had shaved and dressed, and was out, seated on my verandah, before the more distantly posted came in. Nothing could be more picturesque than the scene I watched for the next half-hour. The sun was low down; the long broad shadows of the

palms and bananas lay along the ground. One by one came the 'chasseurs' from under the trees, and passed on, each with his laden Malabar at his heels, most of them highly elated, one or two rather glum; keen sportsmen they were, the last taking to heart a badly-aimed shot, or the bad luck of the day in seeing but few heads of game. The novice, I thought, just now, had the best of it, who felt no shame in his own completer failure, and was delighted with everything. Presently came along the stiff and bleeding trophies of the morning—a never-ending procession, as it appeared to me. A single Indian, then two, slipped along, their legs bending under their burden, the dead game swinging to and fro, and keeping time with the men's measured steps.

What a study! How many Schneiders seemed to have left their frames, and to stalk before me in groups of living men and real dead animals! Stag after stag—the legs tied together, rocked on the bamboo pole that was run between; the head with its grand antlers hanging down, sometimes trailing on the ground, the tongue dangling out, and the great big round eye, lately so quick and sparkling, glazed and discoloured.

By the time the last two or three came in it was quite dark; but flashing torches and the loud hum of men's voices told me where the 'abattoir' stood, and that the cutting up of the spoil had commenced.

I peeped in here, as I crossed over to supper. Most of the hooks on the rafters were already garnished with magnificent haunches. Twenty-five head of game had been carried in, out of which about twenty well-grown stags were counted as the bonâ fide results of the day's raid.

I had almost forgotten to mention the laconic frankness of my Malabar when we were together at our post. After I had fired and missed, the man's face put on quite a different expression from the one it had hitherto worn; and that I had fallen to Zero in his estimation I saw plainly enough.

'Vous êtes fort fusil, vous,' as I handed him my gun for re-loading. 'Oh, non, Monsieur!'

'Mais mieux que moi.'

'Ah, oui, Monsieur,' and with such a grin of superciliousness.

There was no end of 'chaffing' at supper, all taken more or less good-humouredly; but a hunt seems to me like a game of chess, a most unerring test of temper. One thing was palpable; each hero, whilst boasting of his own exploits, was obligingly incredulous of his neighbours.

To M. ——, a 'fort fusil' by reputation, as ill luck would have it, I may well say at once each day was a blank. Unequal to the second evening's hearty bantering, he disappeared before our summons to the table. Some sudden domestic news had arrived, which his friends seemed thoroughly to understand and heartily laughed

over; and it was this that had unavoidably called him away. I walked home close at his side, and I never saw a man look crosser.

But to understand this, one must have been an eye-witness of the enthusiasm displayed on the occasion of a 'chasse' in Mauritius. On the 15th of May the Creole seems to shed for a time his otherwise every-day skin. He comes out all energy and activity, at least in the woods.

Our host is an avowed lover of this free and healthy life, a chasseur to the backbone from his boyhood, a wonderfully active man for his age, and with all the open-hearted simplicity of manner, cordiality, and genuine love of hospitality, which, I almost fancy, are inseparable from it. He hates innovations—improvements he disdains to call them. One of his near neighbours, who thinks more of his cane-fields than his game-preserves, has lately made a new road, by which the 'Hangar' at —— is more easily accessible than before. M. —— nevertheless prefers going a considerable way round, and along, as I am told, a very bad road, to using another, which he considers a trespass on the rights of the deer. With an eye full of glee he told me the game on his estate is now yearly increasing; thanks to laws and regulations strictly enforced. Not many years ago, owing to the absence of them, or to their being utterly disregarded, 'you might be in the forest a couple of days,' he said, with a sigh

for the past, 'and not fire off your gun!' He reckons at present a yearly addition on his estate of from four to five hundred head over and above those killed during the legal period of the 'chasse,' which is about three months.

In the course of conversation at supper the second evening, M. —— told me he remembered when a hollowed bamboo, with a flaring bit of cotton, was stuck in the ground between every two guests, to light the room and table, a more primitive manner certainly than the branched candlesticks now used. The banquet of Macbeth, as put on the stage by Charles Kean, had already risen up before me as I looked about; but with these bamboo torches there would have been no difference if one put costume out of the question.

The first thing my eyes fell on the next morning, as, again roused by the cock and dog 'duo,' I stepped out into the twilight, were two huge haunches of venison lying at our door on banana leaves. They were for my companion, ——, and myself; a well-earned guerdon on his part, an undeserved one on mine. Each member of our large party received a like offering both mornings from the lord of the hunt.

The scenery of our second day's operations bore so totally different an aspect from that of the previous one, that I must inflict further descriptions upon my reader.

We all started on foot. About ten minutes walk from our huts brought us to the edge of a high bank, down which we immediately proceeded to scramble. We then crept along a slimy kind of path, which followed the windings of a rapid little river. So uncertain was our footing that we had to catch hold of straying roots to keep ourselves from tumbling down into the water. This we had to ford three or four times, often plunging in up to our waists; those at least who, like myself, were not sure-footed enough to hazard jumping across on the slippery bits of protruding rock, round which the water angrily gushed, as if impatient of the obstacle. There was one instance of miscalculated agility, and souse in went the victim, raising a most tremendous splash, and roars of laughter. But a little more, and he would have been carried down quicker and farther than he would have liked, or we should have laughed at. Before long, I had inwardly rejoiced a dozen times in having braved advice given me very pertinaciously, and somewhat tartly too, the night before, by one of the three of my fellow-countrymen. Setting at defiance all his assurances of over-fatigue necessarily to be incurred, which proved simply ridiculous, I would, and did, go to the very extremity of the hunting-ground. But I even thought how much fatigue would I willingly have endured before I could have in the least regretted any portion of

it. Nothing short of absolute injury but would have been repaid by all I saw to-day! We had a walk of two hours before reaching the two posts, the last of all, where my friend —— and I were to be placed. We were within hearing of each other,—or more strictly speaking, should have been, but for the roar of crashing waters. A considerable fall was close to me—the cascade of 'Dya Mamou,' and out and out the finest in regard to volume and height I have yet seen in Mauritius. It stands, too, in the centre of the most enchanting landscape. It is formed by the 'Grand River,' called, in addition, 'South East,' to distinguish it from another. Higher up it receives the two tributary streams of the 'Rempart' and 'Vacoa' rivers. There is a wide lake-like space—a sort of 'carrefour' of waters, where all three streams meet, which we took some minutes to ford; and picturesque enough we all looked as I turned back, picking our way in a twisting, broken line, some of us nearly swimming. No group can ever fail to be picturesque with Indians in it.

The scenery about here baffles all my powers of description. I never saw the bamboo grow so high, nor so luxuriantly; I measured one or two of the stems, and found that my finger and thumb stretched their widest would not take in the diameter. Heavy masses of the sombre jamrose were mixed up with all this light green feathery

foliage—a most perfect study of light and shade—while palms, which grew about in great numbers, now close down to the water's edge, now high up on the bank, gave a look of extreme gracefulness and lightness to the whole. I did not, during the whole day, see above two or three tree-ferns. It is curious how often one seeks in vain for these beautiful children of the forest. Like many other beautiful children, they are apparently capricious, and you may go on sometimes for miles and never find one in the very spot where you would fancy they would most love to grow.

My 'post' was scarcely a hundred yards above the Dya Mamou falls. At my feet the river spread out into a broad, shallow basin, with hundreds of transparent side-pools and curling eddies, the current down the middle very strong, forming rapids which fret and foam until, baffled at last by the huge pieces of rock, they seem to give up all further struggle, and subside into the enormous green glassy sheet, which slides over a height of, I imagine, about a hundred feet. To all this there is a noble background. Right opposite me rose a conically-shaped mountain, not very high, but thickly wooded to the very summit. Here human foot has trod at times, but human hand has never yet been raised to mar the primitive beauty of the forest! I looked up in positive ecstasy—a feeling almost of awe crept over me, as I reflected that, across yonder amphitheatre of

trees, for centuries and centuries, sunshine had gleamed, and the fierce hurricane had swept; but that, as far as the interference of destructive man, those green fastnesses rose up before me unmutilated, intact, as on the evening and morning of that day when God saw that they were good.

After waiting a full hour in my hiding-place, a thicket under a shelving bank, my eyes strained, my gun cocked, I got so fidgetty that I could remain quiet no longer. I felt I must wander a few yards farther, if only to sit down on the very edge of the fall. I rested my gun against a branch, and as I was wet through up to my chest I was soon lying my length on the warm rock, over which the sun was partially shining. I had lain there some time, letting my thoughts run delicious riot, the water roaring below and almost deafening me, when suddenly, through all this noise came the sharp, distinct, clear sound of a single rifle-shot; the echo caught it up, and sent it ringing again and again up the valley! I turned my head in the direction whence it came, a bed of trees, whose branches dipped down and dabbled in the water. I was just in time to see a magnificent stag spring through them from the top of the bank, amid a shower of loose earth, into the river. The current was too strong for the poor beast. He tottered and fell, then rose again, though mortally stricken; with every limb quivering he stared proudly and defiantly about

him for a second. Another shot, another ball unerringly put in, and down he came for ever. His struggles waxed feebler and feebler, and he was on the point of being hurried along, and hurled over the foaming precipice, when a strong eddy sent him spinning round, and threw him sideways between two blocks of rock. There he stopped; once again he slightly raised his grand head, and then fell prostrate like a lump of lead!

When I got nearer to him, I found the water in which he half lay dyed deeply with his rich purple blood. Scarcely had I glanced at him, when down came the dogs in full cry; all hurry-scurry, darting out in all directions from under the trees on the bank, springing over that and plunging madly into the water: in they dashed, one after the other, panting, yelping, lapping, leaping from stone to stone, slipping off, then breasting the stream; but all with their scent suddenly at fault. I never saw such a picture in my life. Why was not Landseer standing by my side? He has painted again and again, in never-dying colours, stags, dogs, rapids, rocks, and birch and heather, but never has he backed his matchless groups with the feathery bamboo, the gloomy jamrose, the palm, and tree-fern, and the wild citron loaded with golden clusters. Any one who can paint can imagine how at that moment I coveted his talent. What a picture was I gazing at! what a distance, what a

foreground, what light and shade, what colour, what form!

I did my best to discover why these falls bear the uncreole name of 'Dya Mamou.' The words I found are Malagasy. The reasons given were legion; but, as far as I could make out, here is the true version of the story current among the people. The country about here was a favourite place of refuge for the 'Maroons,' or fugitive slaves of old days. The wildness of it was well calculated to afford them good shelter, and complete concealment, as long as the pursuit was confined to the masters themselves. But when these hunters of human game called in the blood-hound to their assistance, no hole ever so remote seemed any longer inaccessible.

Notwithstanding this, however, a Malgash Maroon, called Dya Mamou, continued to baffle every attempt to take him for ten years. He was tracked again and again, and actually hunted up to the edge of the falls, but there he always gave his pursuers, both men and dogs, the slip. One day when so chased he was seen to leap the falls, and it was supposed he was drowned, but after awhile, to the amazement of all, he re-appeared. I could not ascertain what was his reputed end; but in consequence of the exploit above mentioned, he was given credit for being in league with the devil, if not the devil himself, and probably for the rest of his life had an easier time of

it, from being so far under his satanic majesty's protection. Many years after it was discovered that a large cavity existed in the rock behind the falls, and was completely concealed by them. Into this it is supposed that Dya Mamou, being an expert diver, had often retreated, and there remained till his human pursuers had retired, and their bloodhounds with them.

Those were cruel days, when these wretched slaves who fled for their lives were pursued and hunted down like beasts; and who knows but some of the descendants of those bloodthirsty masters were beating the woods with me this very morning, as their ancestors had done before them, after their black human game.

Not being so easy of access as many parts of this island, and seldom visited, I imagine, but on occasions like the present, the great natural beauties of this particular spot are known but to few; and, alas! I believe properly appreciated by fewer! I could not help thinking, as I watched the stag in his last agonies, that it was something to die in the midst of such beauty. Poor beast! how often perhaps had he sprung down the bank to slake his thirst in that clear sparkling stream, as little conscious then, as to-day, of lurking danger! nay, more, maybe in the dim twilight of that very morning he had crossed those rapids merrily, and tripped over that fresh turf in all the pride of life, exulting in his power of speed,

in his strength of muscle and sinew. How know we that these children of the forest are not gifted with some sense, hidden to us, by which, after their own manner, they love their leafy haunts and revel in the witcheries of the scenery in the middle of which they pass their brief existence. The lark 'that tirra tirra chants' must, I feel certain, knowingly exult in the glorious sunshine, when she goes bounding up and up into the clear heaven. Is it a stretch of imagination then to suppose that a like power of enjoyment is not wholly denied to the other members of creation whose reason is instinct?

Such were the thoughts that crossed my mind before the 'Piqueur' had made his appearance once more, and summoned me to return homewards. It was getting dark; Dya Mamou roared on, but the opposite woods were becoming more and more indistinctly visible, as the shadows of evening were closing over them, to hide them for ever from my sight! Well, I am thankful to have seen them that once! and that I can carry the reflection of their beauty about with me wherever I go!

We went back a shorter way—by the opposite bank to the one of the morning, and through the forest. I could scarcely see five yards before me, what with the absence of the sun and the thickness of the foliage, but I could hear that river just below flowing on, as flow it will for ever, and gliding unchecked into eternity.

The day had been beautiful—more so even than yesterday; the frowns on Nature's face were less settled; the smiles brighter. How many people live here for awhile, and go away, believing there is nothing else to see than strangely-peaked mountains, the eternal cane-fields they pass every day, and the ravine they look down into, but care not to explore. I am myself, I know, enthusiastic about nature. I thank God I am; but I am certain I do not exaggerate the beauties of the scenery of Mauritius. Many lie out of the beaten track, and must be found. Like a coy maiden, Nature often loves to wrap a veil about her charms, and chooses to be sought out by her admirers before she will lift it. Mrs —— called Mauritius one day a 'filthy little hole.' I am told she was brought up in London, and in the City. Perhaps some of those choked alleys, paved as they are with gold, of which her father's pockets are said to be full, have charms for her, which tropical scenery has not. Poor wealthy thing!

Our evening was more or less a counterpart of the two previous. M. —— amused me by his criticism of the English language.

'Ma foi, Monsieur, le fond de votre langue c'est—*Indeed!*'

There was a 'bout de chasse' for the few that remained for a bonâ fide good breakfast the next morning; but I slipped away when the rest

shouldered their guns, and dived down once more into the ravine. I felt sad, for I knew this would be my last look at it for ever.

At one o'clock we started homewards.

I can never forget the Dya Mamou, the picturesque 'roughness' of the Hangar, the hearty hospitality of its master, nor the kind feeling displayed towards me by so many I then saw for the first time in my life, and for the last. My enjoyment had been intense, not a little enhanced by the pleasant companionship and good humour of ——, whom I drove to that ever-to-be-remembered 'chasse' and back again home.

CHAPTER XX.

EPSOM IN MAURITIUS.

I MUST not leave Mauritius without speaking of the races. That would, indeed, to use a hackneyed simile, be the play of Hamlet without the Prince. Our 'yamseh,' as I have endeavoured to show you, is the great annual 'festa,' or, in more appropriate phraseology, the especial 'flare-up' of the *people*. In like manner our races are the grand event of the year for the more exalted members of society. The full enjoyment of them, however, is by no means confined to one class. High and low, tag-rag and bobtail, congregate together on each of the three days, but more especially on the last.

I have been present each year since I arrived, and I did not discover, on the last occasion, that the mere novelty of the scene had very much to do with creating the impression I received when I first saw this curious, lively, and striking sight. All business is at a complete standstill. Almost every shop is closed; the offices, both public and private, empty themselves at an early hour,

and before twelve o'clock shut up. The world entire collects on 'the Champ de Mars,' and there remains the whole afternoon. On the last of the three days, always Saturday, the planters throughout the island give a holiday to their labourers. It was computed that at the last meeting there were present between fifty and sixty thousand persons; but this —— assured me was below the mark.

You may imagine the striking character of such an assemblage. The vast amphitheatre of hills, and the vast arena of turf at their base, dotted and studded with moving masses of every bright and flashy colour.

The last time, I drove into Port Louis early. A continuous stream of chattering, gesticulating Indians flowed along on each side of me. One thing struck me particularly—the utter absence of what I may call merriment. No one laughed, unless here and there some young mother with her dressed-up doll of a child. The two sexes seemed to be indifferent to each other, and almost without exception were divided. Men walked and talked with men, women with women. How different, I thought, from Italians, whom in many other respects they resemble. What fun! what wit! what sallies! what repartee! what provocatives of laughter there would have been in a corresponding large crowd walking into Rome. They were all in their holiday suits, and when

the course was densely crowded it looked like a hugely magnified pattern of silken patchwork.

The distance which the horses run is about three-quarters of a mile. Of the actual races it is best to say little. It sounds paradoxical, but if the horses were worse, the races would be better. High prices are paid for one or two, but they are all in the same stable, and Monsieur C——'s rest the night before cannot be much disturbed by any anticipations of great discomfiture on the morrow.

The horses, then, I should say, are about the last thing the crowd takes any interest in.

On one of the days it seemed to me that an impromptu foot-race created far more genuine excitement than all the rest of the day's doings put together.

The sight is exceedingly curious, and in many respects, I imagine, unique. A row of private stands or 'loges' runs along the whole of one side of the ground. The prices given for these boxes would startle you. They are put up to auction some time previous to the races, and knocked down to the highest bidder. Some are very smartly fitted up with draperies of silk or velvet, bedizened with gold or silver tinsel. These generally display *coffee-coloured linings*. Rows and rows of black faces stare out of them. The flashiest 'toilettes' are in like manner exhibited by the dark-skinned fashionables. Carriages

move about, filled with the most gorgeously-equipped sable dames and damsels, and when two or three of these *ladies* sit together in one it looks more or less like a pot of tulips.

The topic 'par excellence' of conversation in the early part of the day is as to who are the favoured few who bask in the rays of royalty within the governor's box. The nearest approach to this exalted privilege ever achieved by us was to sit underneath it, and this thanks to Madame ——. We at least came in for a share of the glances cast upon those above;—a reflex on such an occasion is something.

On all three days Mrs —— throws open her house to the 'élite' of the society, and 'tiffin' goes briskly on to a late hour. Royalty, even, on that day, descends from its pedestal, and condescends to satisfy hunger in the most unreserved and gracious manner at Mrs —— 's loaded table.

No one, I must say, leaves it without feeling what an amount of charm can be thrown into the few words that bid you welcome during the intervals of the actual racing.

CHAPTER XXI.

FAUNA.

Of our Fauna the readers shall have the best sketch I can give. Let them please to remember, at the same time, that I am no Buffon.

But before they read more of my letter, just let them look at their map, and see what an isolated, diminutive speck on the face of the world we are! 'Far away,' in all truth. Our nearest neighbours are the Islands of Bourbon* and Rodriques. The first is eighty miles distant; it is often distinctly visible at sunset. I saw the whole outline once standing out as black as ink against a deep-orange sky. Rodriques is three hundred miles off.

Most of our animals have been introduced at different periods. According to our great ornithological authority here, out of thirty species of birds, exactly one half have been imported, while of the other fifteen many are yearly becoming scarcer. Some attribute this to the wholesale destruction, still, alas, going on, of the forests, for the exten-

* Now 'Réunion.'

sion of the cane-fields.* There is a famous old nursery direction for catching birds with salt. It seems you may also drive them away with sugar!

One or two of our creatures are supposed to be peculiar either to Mauritius itself or to the Mascarene Islands, of which, I suppose, the reader knows we are one.

Well! by way of beginning, I will introduce a funny little animal — the *tendrec*,† first known here when it was let loose from a slave-ship, coming from Madagascar, about seventy years ago. It now literally swarms all over the island. It is of the hedgehog family, but without the power of rolling itself up, and with a far less spikey coat, of a yellowish brown. It is a beautifully formed little beast. When in a rage, and its bristles are up, it is what one might imagine a diminutive wild boar would be. It feeds on snails and slugs; and whenever heavy rains lure hapless insects forth, the tendrec is sure to be abroad and greedily watching. The female has three litters in the year. As soon as a new family arrives, the former one makes way for the babies. The elder offspring immediately turn out of the sleeping apartment, the nursery being specially appropriated to mother and infants. This nursery

* In 1739 about fourteen sugar plantations only existed, and these comparatively small. There are now, I believe, nearer three hundred estates on which sugar is manufactured.

† Erinaceus setosus.

is a very commodious chamber, and quite apart from the rest of the burrow—an excellent hint, surely, for human house-economy, particularly where mammas follow the example of tendrecs, and have very large families. The children's quarters are kept scrupulously clean and tidy, and the creature preserves this habit after nearly a century's residence among Creoles. 'Che! Stupendo!' as our old Neapolitan porter used to cry out, at sundry doings of the English family.

In another respect the tendrec is less dissimilar from those about him, for he sleeps away half the year. Some naturalists maintain that the kind we have is a species peculiar to Mauritius and Bourbon, and not exactly the same as the tendrec of Madagascar. But if it came thence it must have acquired its distinguishing points since it landed. To argue the mere possibility of this would be boring some, and a plunge out of my own depth, into a much-vexed theory, I believe, among naturalists.

The tendrec is an article of food among the lowest classes, and was formerly sold in the market. It smells, when cooking, very like roast pig.

We have the *musk-rat*,* which, like the tendrec, feeds on insects. This little fellow is exceedingly common. I scarcely ever went out of an evening with my dog that he did not kill two

* Sorex indicus.

or three. It is apparently one of the stupidest creatures in existence, for, in addition to its perfume being quite sufficient to attract an enemy, it never fails to reveal its immediate proximity in a manner more dangerous if not more unmistakable. On anything strange approaching it, you instantly hear its shrill voice, and a loud squeaking soon betrays its alarm, and discloses its hiding-place. It came here originally from Ceylon. The advantage of its introduction, if purposed, I should call questionable. Its size is about half that of a small common rat, the colour is grey, a very long snout, ears short, eyes very small, and evidently with an imperfect vision, for it will often let you all but tread on it before it tries to escape. It runs along the ground in a sort of undecided zigzag course, like a Chinese paper-toy on invisible wheels, and it is said never to jump. When the family goes out for the day on a visit, or changes its residence altogether, the manner of conveying the younger members is singular. They are ordered to entangle their tails with their mamma's, and thus she carries some and drags others, but never, I am told, loses one. As to the strength of the very disagreeable odour that gives the animal with us its distinguishing name, I have heard the most contradictory assertions. I have known it flatly denied, that, subtle as the musk is, the animal has the power of tainting the liquor by merely running over the

outside of the bottle. On this point I can only tell of two instances, one from my own experience, the other from hear-say. Some years ago I met the widow of a once celebrated Indian bishop. She herself told me that when in Calcutta, her husband had a large quantity of very fine wine in his cellar, which had not been disturbed for some time after its arrival. The first day they came to drink it it was so strongly *musked* that more than one-half had eventually to be thrown away. In the other instance I can vouch for myself. I was coming home on board H.M.S. ——, since rather unceremoniously consigned, it has been said by its officers, to Davy's locker. At dessert, one day, I filled my glass as usual, and passed the bottle; but I had no sooner sipped my wine than I perceived the strongest taste of musk. I drank no more. I had then never seen the animal, and had only heard of its being able to communicate its peculiar perfume in the way alluded to. There had been a good deal of grumbling about our mess, and what with an unwillingness to find fault, and the idea of being laughed at for my pains if I hinted at the musk-rat, I said nothing. The bottle pursued its course. Some drank their wine, some did not. I watched, and fancied I perceived a lip or two smack funnily; but nothing was said. At last the bottle stood before ——. This officer was supposed to love the good things of life more

than most of us, and wine, not the least, among them. He filled his bumper as usual, and tossed it off. Whew! whew!—he turned his face, the ludicrous expression of which I can still remember, and sputtered all over the back of his chair.

'Why, good heavens! gentlemen, you are indeed good judges of wine. Here is a bottle nearly emptied, and a legion of musk-rats must have played their pranks over it for a twelvemonth.'

Few cats, if any, will touch—I mean eat—this creature; dogs, I believe, never; they do no more than kill it, and then run away, at least mine always behaved so, and it seemed to me that he even thought twice before he caught hold of it.

But the rat, par excellence, here, is the common grey one. Ah! parlez moi de cela! It is, indeed, legion! It is said to have become so utterly intolerable to the Dutch settlers that they abandoned the island rather than hold dominion in conjunction with, or rather under, the rats. I shall never forget going one morning into my stable; the two grooms had just fed the ponies, and were cleaning the harness, one of them making noise enough, I should have supposed, to scare away every rat in the place. Not a bit! I saw a dozen, at least, seated in a row on the rafters, like fowls roosting, peering quietly down

with all the airs of upper-coachmen superintending their underlings' work.

Rats are the pest of the planters. The damage done in a cane-field in a few weeks, in spite of traps and dogs, is scarcely credible. It would signify less if a rat would merely take to his one cane and conscientiously eat it up outright before he began his second; but he nibbles at a dozen different ones in five minutes; the tissue is instantly injured, and fermentation follows. One planter told me that he set down the rats killed yearly on his estate at upwards of 40,000. Take two canes to a single rat, a ridiculous computation, and ten years ago this kind of loss alone in the island was put annually at upwards of £10,000.

The canes certainly entice these disagreeable visitors from other haunts at certain seasons. As soon as the cane is sufficiently advanced, away go the greater number of them for their 'villegiatura.' The mischief done, therefore, in the inside of houses is comparatively small to what it probably was in Dutch times, when sugar in the island was a production unknown. Some of ours seemed to have a very sociable turn. It was as if they were constantly giving a ball over-head, with a magnificent sit-down supper, I make no doubt, at our expense.

Dogs are kept on almost every estate for the purpose of hunting them down, and their destruction is encouraged in every possible manner;

yet, with all this, they are what I have described them.

When I was sitting waiting for my supper, on the occasion of my hospitable reception by St Michael,* a Malabar came up to the verandah, holding what looked to me, in the twilight, like a bundle of small ropes. On nearer inspection I discovered that his hand was full of freshly-lopped rats' tails; blood, indeed, was still dripping from them. St Michael fixed his eyes on the man, as according to orders, he turned them over, one after the other, much as a London shopman turns over his knotted skeins of coloured silks, reckoning the amount gained by this wholesale slaughter, at so much per dozen. It was a ludicrous parody, as I thought, not for the rats, of that horrid story told, if I remember, by Sir T. Malcolm in his Sketches of Persia, where some great man —the Shah himself, I think—plunges the jewelled handle of his whip into a bowl, and counts over a heap of rebels' eyes, which are presented him as he is putting his foot in the stirrup to set out on a hunting excursion.

Being on the subject of destructive animals, I will mention a biped that is almost a match for the rat, though, strictly speaking, this species does not belong to the 'fauna.' I mean the 'dobie' or washerman. Of course we are primitive enough here to prefer rivers to tubs, and,

* Vide Chapter 7, *Out of Doors*.

alas, the rivers have stones. One morning, soon after my arrival, I heard at the bottom of the garden what sounded like the well-known responsive grunt of a London paviour to his ram. This was our 'dobie' down at the river-side. Oh! buttons and button-holes, and above all, oh seams and gathers! how do you ever survive even your first visit to the 'dobie!' What with the wash-tub Nature provides for us, and the vehemence of the dobies' own operations, we are indeed speedily reduced to shreds in Mauritius.

Our dobie is an exceedingly gallant youth, and to this, maybe, is owing the more enviable treatment of A——'s linen. Her muslins come back in a state of diaphanous flutter, that she declares rivals the washing of Paris itself; but while she stands exulting, I am mourning over departed fastenings by half-dozens.

We have two *quadrumana*—the monkey and the lemur; of the last, I find, there are several species, * but it rarely shows itself. I never came

* One of these is the rare and curious aye aye, or haï haï, of which people in England have lately been hearing a good deal. I am sorry to say the only one at all I have seen here is the wretchedly stuffed specimen in the museum. I take the liberty of extracting from a paper published a year or two ago in the Mauritian Almanac, some interesting facts as to the habits of the haï haï:—'

'This lemur, which is about the size of an ordinary cat, seems to approximate more to the squirrel than to any other member of its genus. Instead of being covered with the soft

across one in its wild state at all. Not so the monkey; of these last I have seen a numerous

woolly fur, with which they are generally clothed, the haï haï's coat consists principally of long, rather coarse hair. In place of the cylindrical tail covered equally on all sides with soft fur, we find a flattened growth of long hair, much resembling that of the squirrel; but, strange to say, this is not carried with the sigmoid curve, common to the others. The small ears, almost hidden in the fur, which distinguished the other species, are supplied by an external ear of a very large size.

* * * * * *

'Lastly, the cutting teeth have no likeness to those of its congeners, but are evidently formed for gnawing, and at first sight would be thought simply those of one of the ordinary rodentia; on closer examination, however, they will be found more of the wedge than the chisel, more formed for rending or splitting, than for cutting; and here we remark the perfect adaptation of the instrument to its especial use * * * The special use of these teeth is to lay open the retreats of larvæ, which burrow in the cambium of the wood, and this being soft enough to allow of its being detached in pretty large pieces. The teeth of the haï haï are evidently better for this kind of work than those of the rodentia. Its paws are not less singular than its teeth. All its fingers are slender, but the middle finger is like a piece of wire, and upwards of three inches in length. Let us see how these remarkable ears and unique teeth and fingers are employed. Mr Sandwith having allowed the specimen he exhibited to go at large in the house, remarked that it frequently listened at the partition of the apartment, tapping occasionally the boards with its hooked-like claw. Having caused a branch to be cut and brought in, the haï haï, after sounding in many places, detected an echo which revealed the existence of game. Tearing off several large splinters of wood, the burrow of the insect was sufficiently

company at a time collected in the ravine. My guide told me they come regularly down from the rocks to the river every morning to perform their ablutions. At any rate, I have found them there more than once, in an early ramble, skipping from stone to stone, and chattering like so many —No! I will not say what, and many will pretend they do not guess what. 'Ten measures of garrulity,' says the Talmud, 'came down from heaven, and woman took nine!' The monkey, then, must have come to some private arrangement, as to at least sharing this very unfair appropriation. The skin of the monkey here is of a dull grey. When regularly hunted, the dog is set to 'tree' the game within reach of the gun. Once up, the wary beast rarely comes down again, unless mortally hit, when it often drops into the very jaws of the dogs. The female is a model for mothers. She displays the greatest tenderness for her young, and untiring care of them, and she will die in defence of the little one sooner than leave

uncovered, the claw was thrust in, and the larvæ drawn forth and devoured. This unique claw serves the creature not only as a fork, but spoon. Presented with water, instead of lapping like a dog, as do the other lemurs, it threw the water into its mouth by rapidly opening and closing the claw. They are said always to select some spot in a river where there is a fall of water, and there sitting down upright, to drink in this remarkable way.'

it behind. In some parts of the island they vie with the rats in the rapidity of their havoc among the canes.

Dogs, for the most part, are a poor specimen, and a mongrel one too, of their race. They are more inclined, I think, to be mangy here than anywhere else that I have seen. I have heard that in some parts of the country you may meet a pack of wild ones; but I never have been told where, and I doubt it.

Cats are abundant; they are often apt to follow their natural instincts, and to return to the woods, and this, even after many years of domestication. Not many years ago the blacks ate them, and, perhaps, do now. We missed one of ours most unaccountably one day, and I am almost inclined to think he might have taken the place of a hare on some nigger dinner-table in the vicinity.

Horses are imported from France, but principally from Australia and the Cape of Good Hope. Ponies are far better adapted to the hilly grounds, and to the casualties of stables under Indian coachmen: the best come from Pegu, which, as may not be remembered, I just whisper is in Burmah. They stand about fourteen hands high. Java, Timur, and other islands of the Malay Archipelago also send us a considerable quantity in the course of the year. We hear of a horse or

two occasionally being bred here, but I imagine he seldom proves worth all the trouble taken about him.

Asses are common. They come mostly from Arabia. If ever his Holiness the Pope be at a loss for a white one, which is a somewhat rare creature in Europe, if he will send to Mauritius he may drive himself up to the steps of St Peter's, if he likes, four in hand. He might even change his team every year. What think you too? I once saw a dead one! a dead donkey, and to boot a white one!

Mules are imported in great quantities from France, South America, Africa, and the Persian Gulf. They are very commonly used by Creole families for their private carriages, but for farm work and on the plantations they have almost entirely, if not quite, superseded oxen. They are very fine, some about sixteen hands high, and fetch extravagant prices. Here will be a saving soon to the planters, in the substitution of railways, and a benefit too to the public, by the absence of the mules, together with the unwieldy sugar carts, from the high-roads.

Madagascar sends us beef, and bad enough too. Buffaloes are brought ashore in a most pitiable state; there is a large open space of ground just out of the town, where the emaciated cargo, as soon as landed, is generally turned out, oftener than not, mere skeletons. It is of the

humped species, and naturally a fine large animal. Under the yoke it is extremely docile.

A few cows come from England and France; but the commonest kind is a small, delicately-formed, and exceedingly pretty creature, more like our Alderney than any other, barring its hump, which is called the Aden cow; but I conclude it has a right to the name only from the fact of being shipped from that barren spot. Cows in Mauritius are invariably stall-fed: at least I believe it is a very, very rare occurrence if they are allowed to graze, and they are then always tethered. This precaution is taken on account of the Ipecacuanha plant, deadly to them, of which you see the lovely little starry flowers peeping out like sets of scarlet 'pleiads,' wherever much grass is found.

Of sheep I had best say but little, or my friends in Mauritius, if they come to know what I think of mutton here, will dub me ungrateful. It is one of the dainties you are expected to consider a treat, and to like willy nilly. With two exceptions, perhaps, as yet I have never in the least cared for it, both at the same dining-table, that of an hospitable neighbour who lives across the road.

People club together, buy a sheep, feed, kill, and share it; and in this way the best joint, both for size and quality, is obtained, but it never has in my opinion a good English mutton-flavour. If

you go to the market for it, you run the risk of bringing home a metamorphosed goat; and so far, I have sometimes thought it the best of the two here.

Goats are numerous; every Malabar keeps two or three, but I never hear of the milk being drunk as it is in other countries, and yet I think it must be.

Pigs apparently are an uncleaner animal here than elsewhere. Pork is seldom eaten, unless it be extracted from the well-known tin-box, packed in Europe. 'Never eat pork,' was a piece of advice, with many another, that we received on first arriving. The Chinamen are the pork-butchers, and principal consumers of their meat too; somewhat of a cannibal taste, judging from their looks—as 'fat as a pig,' comparative; as fat as a Chinaman, (often) superlative!

The wild pig,* as well as the wild goat,† is to be found in the woods.

Of one more quadruped a word or two, and I have done with this portion of the Fauna; a noble creature, which I have already introduced, the deer.‡ It is nearly as big as the red deer of Europe, of a lightish brown graduating to white on the belly. The brow antler

* Sus scrofa. † Capra hircus.

‡ Cervus elephus according to some, or according to others Cervus rusa, a native of Java. I am not compelled to say which. Is it the deer of Ceylon?

and the medial are all they ever bear, and are produced by the fourth year, after which the animal only increases in size. Deer abound in Mauritius, and furnish its supreme boast, as I have already made known, 'La chasse au cerf.' Returning once from Mähebourg by the rail, we passed two herds of thirty or forty each; they were feeding at a short distance, and did not seem to heed the train, which surprised me; just one or two raised their grand heads and gazed, then fed on quietly.

Of amphibious animals we have but one, the frog; this solitary creature, of its kind here, came from Madagascar, the end of the last century; it is small. In some parts one rouses a dozen at every step in the grass, if near water.

Toads are restricted to two or three ill-stuffed monsters in the museum. None living are known here.

As a preliminary to birds, as he has wings, I will begin with the great bat—*Rousselle,* or *flying fox.** The first I saw was a stuffed one on the walls of Mr ——'s dining-room. It had been killed very lately. The body was the size of a smallish guinea-pig; the spread of the wing must have been three feet or more; the body in colour, and the nose in shape, very foxy. This creature is the 'dainty dish,' I have before spoken of, which my host of the Black River gorge regretted not

* Pteropus edulis.

being able to produce on our breakfast-table. In Mauritius, like the famous musical blackbirds, it is considered fit

'To set before a king.'

These huge bats swarm in several parts of the island, and especially in the above-mentioned district,—after the fashion of other bats, of which I may say, *en passant*, we have two or three kinds. They come out 'when twilight creeps along the vale.' The motion of the wings is slow and heavy, they are fond of the juices of plants, for which their tongues are peculiarly adapted. They have the power of greatly extending them so as to dive into the cup of the flower. They are excellent mothers, not ceasing to carry about the baby, even when nearly of an equal size to its parent. They are easily tamed. Major —— had one not long ago in his room which ate out of his hand, and used to hang to the back of his chair, and give a sort of little chirp of recognition.

Of *bonâ fide* birds there are many, of which the plumage is very beautiful; but let me head my catalogue with the one that has made more noise in the naturalist's world than all the others, perhaps, put together—the *dodo*.* This feathered subject of speculation and dispute among ornithologists is likely to excite a greater interest now than ever. Within a very short time bones

* Didus ineptus.

have been exhumed, that almost constitute a perfect skeleton, and I doubt not before long the missing ones will be discovered. The British Museum, and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford; are shorn of their long peculiar glory in the matter of the dodo. Other collections may now possess, if they choose, a nearly entire specimen. Naturalists are indebted to Mr George Clark for this interesting discovery. In the account* he gives he tells us that he had sought for the remains of this extinct bird during many years. Like a host of other things long and anxiously looked for, they seem to have been all the while close at hand. Certainly this is the age for discovering on the very surface of the earth treasures hitherto supposed to be buried deeply in its bowels! The discovery of the dodo bones was made in the following manner. A few months ago† Mr Clark was informed that among some bones of another extinct member of the Mauritian Fauna, a tortoise, portions of a tibia had been picked up, measuring four inches. On examination the fact of their belonging to a large bird was undoubted. Away goes Mr Clark, quicker, certainly, than it may be presumed the

* I have read this since my return to England, having left Mauritius shortly after Mr Clark's discovery, indeed. I believe I had the honour of being a fellow-traveller with a box of dodo relics sent home by another ornithologist of repute.

† In 1865.

dodo itself would have done, to a small piece of marshy ground not far from the sea, but only a few yards from the high road, called 'La Mare aux Songes,'* where men were digging peat. Here the ornithological speculations of many years were destined to receive their solution. Tibiæ, pelves, femora, sterna, scapulæ, vertebræ, mandibles, and other bones were picked out of the mud, and were soon actually being handled and assorted by the exulting man of science. Imagine his delight!

Crania and upper mandibles were rare. Mr Clark attributes this to their probable destruction by the separation of the parts by roots. The bones so found were mostly of two different dimensions, but in the case of each, counterpart; they were not however very unequal in size; and Mr Clark sets this diversity down as the mere distinctions of sex. I have seen many of them in his house. He placed each on the corresponding drawings of the dodo bones, a volume of which lay on his table; nothing could be more identical in size and shape. Not one of the small bones of the toes† has he found.‡ The growth of the marsh-loving plants is supposed to have preserved the others, which were buried under the light

* Caladium esculentum. † Phalanges.

‡ In 1865; I know not if later discovery has produced them.

soil, from the action of the atmosphere: and hence their state of .preservation.*

It seems curious that two or three islands, very dots on the globe's vast surface, should have been the abode of a race of giant birds such as no other part of the wide world is as yet known to have produced, and finally that all should have become extinct. Why the dodo was to become so generally known, and the others remain comparatively unknown, who shall say? †

Perhaps we may account for this fact thus: the dodo we know frequented the coast, and hence was naturally seen by the traveller of early days. But he must have been a bold one who penetrated far into the interior of the unknown country; and here, perhaps, these other feathered giants were more particularly domiciled, and wise enough in their instinct to seldom come out from their concealment, especially when the newly arrived traveller was still present.

The *geant,* now proved to be quite distinct from the dodo, was as big as the ostrich, and I have little doubt, as the former has set the fashion,

* The first mention of the dodo made by a traveller was 1598. The last of the living bird, in 1681.

† The enormous birds here alluded to were—1, the *Solitaire* of Rodrigues; 2, the *Oiseau Bleu* of Bourbon; 3 and 4, the *Dodo* and *Geant* of Mauritius. An old French traveller writing of another species of Geant, seen by him in Bourbon, describes them as 'Grands oiseaux montez sur des echasses.'

that the bones of the others will one day turn up, or, more properly speaking, be turned up. When such shall be the case there will be no lack of scientific men to decide, and the question as to whether the 'geant' was a huge water-hen, a flamingo, or of the august family of the ostrich, will possibly, at last, be set at rest. These are days when as many mysteries in nature are solved, as pre-established notions in all things are unsettled!

Perhaps the reader will have wished, before he advanced too far in my letter, that I had also let 'things that are not, be.' So now for the living birds!

There is but one bird of prey, called by the Creoles, and probably with good reason, '*Mangeur des poules.*' It is a hawk, and a beautifully-shaped creature. I have never seen but two specimens, both in the same forest; they flew over my head, scared by the noise of the train, as we on the wings of steam darted by.

The '*Oiseau Banane*' is a pretty little bird, of a greyish colour, tinted with green; the dark speck of an eye is encircled with white, looking like a small black diamond set in a silver ring.

The *Java sparrow* is wild here, but oftener seen in cages than out of them.

The *pingo*, or nutmeg bird, is black and brown, as its name denotes, and delicately streaked. It is beautifully shaped, as is also the *bengale*, or

wax-bill. This last has a striped, fan-like tail, crimson bill, and a shade of grey intermingling with its other tints; but they are pretty well known, for they are common enough in London bird-shops. It is a different thing to see a flock of some dozens whisk past you and settle on a bush of scarlet or orange hibiscus.

We have two kinds of *canaries*—the constant shrill chirping was almost wearying in a grove of filao trees opposite my window, when I was paying a visit in the Savane.*

There are two kinds of climbing birds, the *ring parokeet*, and the little stupid fondling *perruche* or *love-bird*.

Then we have three sorts of *merles*, one peculiar to *Mauritius*.† I had often heard that by a skilful imitation of their note they were easily attracted. In an excursion I made, I found it was quite true. As we sat down to rest, the man we had taken as our guide, in a very wild bit of country, whistled in a peculiar key, and in five minutes several of these merles were perched on the bushes close to us.

The *Oiseau blanc*, or, as the Creoles call it by a pretty corruption of the word, zozo blanc, is the size of a wren, and a most lovely little creature. There were quantities of them in the garden of my first residence, and by fluttering a

* In the southern part of the island.

† Turdus Mauritianus.

handkerchief, I often made them fly out of a tree fifty at a time. They are of a silvery-grey, the under part of the body quite white; the eye, though very small, exceedingly bright: they are very tame. I was lying one day on my back, under a tree, in the ravine, when one of them came fluttering and twittering on a branch close overhead. I whistled faintly, and he came nearer. I whistled on without moving, and the tiny creature came hopping along his twig, till he was so near I could have touched him by stretching out my arm. He stopped and bent his diamond eye upon me curiously, for a second, then flew off to some friends congregated on an aloe opposite, by whom he was received with a loud chorus. He was full of diminutive gesticulations, and I could almost have fancied he was describing the strange-looking acquaintance he had just made.

We can boast of but one *swallow*, or more properly a *swift*, but it is of that peculiar sort—the esculent swallow. I know not if exactly the same as the famous Chinese one; I have never heard of their nests being an article of food in Mauritius; and, as it seems, everything is devoured that can be, from venison down to wasps' nests, I imagine it is not. It is of a brownish black, and I have seen the side of a cliff quite honeycombed by the holes they breed in.

Some of our birds are palpably useful as well as ornamental. The *mina* is one of these. It is

universally called here the marten.* Why the distinguishing epithet 'sad' should be attached to its generic name, I do not guess. I do not think either his plumage, or apparently his habits, entitle him to the word. Mr —— says no bird is seen in greater quantities together; that is cheerful. The body is certainly black, but glossy; it has white upon the wings, and bright orange round the eye. In shape it resembles the English starling, but is bigger. I have also heard that it is tamed with equal ease, and can be taught to whistle and to talk. What can there be *triste* about it? The minas, I have been told, abandoned Port Louis *en masse* during the cholera. Some few re-appeared sooner, but the greater part remained away till the complete cessation of that terrible scourge.

As soon as a cane-field has been cleared by fire, you see hundreds of these birds collect together almost instantaneously. They peck about most greedily; perhaps it is a treat to have their food roasted.

Poultry is so abundant that it should answer to every one to keep it; but what with voracious rats, wholesale thieving Malabars, and the 'Maladie,' † a poultry-yard is a losing concern. Our

* Paradiseus tristis.

† This illness is the greatest scourge of the Creole 'Basse cour.' It is as sudden as generally fatal. The creature is seized with dizziness, and after a pirouette or two, drops down

neighbour, Me——, a short time ago, lost a goose which was sitting. Goose, eggs, nest, and all, were carried clean off in the night. The biped thieves, however, do sometimes give you the option of eating your own fowls. A lady I know, the victim of constant pilfering in the 'Basse cour,' cunningly marked her turkeys' legs, and bagged her stolen poultry, and the impudent rascal of a thief too, who came and offered them for sale as a bargain. I am sure those turkeys must have had an extra delicious flavour when she ate them.

We have the *grey partridge*, and the perdrix picta of India. Both are common enough; and one of the pleasant sounds I shall ever remember in connection with early morning strolls in Mauritius, is the call of these birds.

That arrant vagabond, the *guinea-fowl*,* is also abundantly found in a wild state, especially in the Black River district.

We have also the *quail*, and more than one kind, although I have seen but a single sort myself, and that in the market caged. It is of a bluish-grey, with white about the head, black stripes, and a rich brown on the breast, legs yellow; altogether too pretty a creature to kill and eat.

dead. A neighbour of ours told me she had often dosed her fowls with calomel, and occasionally with success.

* Numida meleagris.

There is no lack of pigeons, but there seems to me to be a very confused idea of the meaning of 'meum' and 'tuum' in regard to them as to much else here. If you *keep* pigeons—that is in the sense of breeding them—I should say it is, nine times out of ten, more for some of your neighbours than for yourself.

We have several kinds of doves, of which the most noteworthy, I believe, are the *pigeon-ramier*, said to be indigenous, the *touterelle of Batavia*—why so named seems enigmatical,—and the *Syrian dove*.

The *pigeon-ramier*—at least so it was named to me—has a grey plumage, with deep crimson eyelids. It is said to be peculiar to Mauritius, and to be rare as well.

The *touterelle of Batavia* is about the size of the English turtle-dove, which it somewhat resembles in colour, but is darker.

The *Syrian dove*, by far the commonest, and very abundant, is about the size of an English blackbird, has a longish tail, blue round the eyes, and delicately pencilled on the edges of the feathers, altogether an exceedingly pretty creature.

There are others, I believe, but I am not ornithologist enough to tell their distinguishing points, and, as it is, I may not have been sufficiently explicit. One consolation to an ignoramus in natural history is, that the knowing

ones often disagree, and in the present case to boot, I do not think some of my readers, at any rate, will try to catch me out in any grave error.

We have two of the birds peculiar to the Tropics, and hence called *Tropic* BIRDS, also the *paille en queue;* one or two feathers, very long and narrow, form the tail. When I am staying at ——, I look down into the ravine from my bedroom window, and see them below floating in the air, like long flakes of snow, and from the bottom I have looked up, and watched them soaring overhead. The tails quiver as they fly rather curiously, something like the motion of eels in water. The one mostly found inland is quite white,* of a glossy silken plumage; the beak black. The other †—I believe I once met with it, for I fancied I saw a flash of red as the bird passed rapidly by—only breeds in 'Round Island,' which consists of a few uninhabited acres rising out of the sea, not very many miles off the coast, to the north-east. The paille en queue is of the Pelican family, and builds in the cliffs. English sailors call it the boatswain. It is a good swimmer.

Little as I know of the other birds, I know still less of those which more particularly frequent the rivers. I often see one kind up here on our own stream. It is called by Creoles the '*gasse.*' It is a small kind of heron; colour, a mixture of grey and green, with a dullish white breast. It

* Phaeton candidus. † Phaeton phœnicurus.

builds in the low trees that clothe the banks and dip into the water. I often hear its cry, which, to me, is somewhat sad.

I now come to the fish.

Those of the sea are wondrously beautiful, and of immense variety. Nothing can be more brilliant than their colours, and, in many instances, quainter than their forms. One, very common, which you often see in European museums, is the oddest-looking creature I ever beheld. A sort of solemn-visaged bull, with a large eye, and two straight horns, and sides broad in proportion to its size, and with two of the same sort of weapons as it bears on its head, sticking out horizontally behind. It seems equally armed for an advancing or retreating enemy, and able to keep both at bay at the same moment. It is called here *coffre taureau*, and it certainly partakes of box as well as bull in shape.*

If you row out some little distance from the shore, within the reef, and look down into the perfectly transparent water, the sight is really as beautiful as it is curious. Some of the innumerable pieces of bright-coloured coral seem to be detached and floating about. You have the most brilliant scarlet, the most vivid canary colour, and a blue that almost surpasses the turquoise itself. These are before you singly. Another

* Ostracion cornutus.

fish is exceedingly beautiful, a mixture of sparkling greens and lilacs. Then you have a mottled brown, relieved with the most delicate grey. Another of an orange, with the appearance of having been burnished, striped with ultramarine. It is impossible to describe them all, or to give you an idea of the manner in which they flash, as they dart about in these sunny waters, or are quite still, as if slumbering, on the smooth white sandy bottom. They soon lose much, if not all, of their brilliancy, when taken out of their own peculiar element. When in it, they rival the flowers on shore. At none of the many beautiful things in nature do I marvel more than at these inhabitants of the tropical seas; so perfectly unlike are they to anything I have ever seen before. A stuffed bird will often give you nearly as good an idea of its richness of colour, as a living one; but it is not so with the fish. You must see them living to know their marvellous beauty. Preserved, they have lost three parts of it.

I must speak of one or two more, particularly as I am by way of 'sketching' Fauna.

For the purposes of the table they are not to be compared generally with their more sombrely-arrayed fellows of Northern seas. The *gouramie*, a fresh-water fish, is our fish par excellence, when it is a question of eating. When you are invited to feast on it, if you fail to do so greedily, you quickly come down a peg or two in the estima-

tion of Mauritian epicures. For all that, I think *the sauce*, which is a *sine qua non*, and is capital, has much to do with the reputation gained by the gouramie. Fine feathers make fine birds. Good sauces make good fish!

The *dame berri*, with its scarlet stripes and olive skin, is more beautiful to look at than worth eating, I think, but I am in the minority. It is the salt-water rival of the gouramie.

Turtles, as I am on the subject of 'friandises,' I may remark, once swarmed on these shores. They are now rare. I know not to what this is attributed. At 'Ascension,' where they are still carefully preserved, they are considered to have rapidly decreased since steamers have disturbed the water with paddles and screws. Like many of their betters, they have been routed out of quiet nooks by the noise of increased civilization.

There is one most formidable fish here, which, I am happy to say, I have as yet never encountered, and, indeed, for long, I never heard of it, or I might have been more chary of my barefooted rambles on the shore. This is the Creole *laf*, which, now I think of it, I wonder our friend Mrs —— did not add to her list of bugbears.* The laf buries itself in the mud or sand, and is the more dangerous for its power of assuming the exact colour of its lurking-place. It is armed with

* Vide Chapter XI.—Random Reminiscences.

a spine, of which the wound is only just short of deadly. I have an account before me of an English soldier who was pricked by one in the hollow of the foot. He was instantly seized with faintness. The pain was so acute, that it required four men to hold him down in his bed when the paroxysms came on, and although he eventually recovered, he was two months in the hospital. The extreme state of weakness he is reduced to, is one of the great dangers the unfortunate patient has to struggle with. A curious fact is related with regard to the wound of the laf, which, in spite of much ridicule, seems to be pretty well established. This is the alleged periodical increase and decrease of pain, consequent upon the rise or fall of the tide. I have heard it stoutly maintained. Believe it or not, reader, as you like; at any rate the assertion is not a trick upon a traveller.

The Creoles have a remedy, of course, at hand. A plant grows on the shore, more certain in its cure, they affirm, than any of those used in the hospitals.*

Another fish, the Creole *cordonnier*,† not so deadly in its effects as the laf, but bad enough, if the accounts be true, carries about the remedy for the injury it inflicts in its own body. If you

* Launea pinna tifida. This plant certainly grows very profusely; more so, it is said, than elsewhere on the parts of the coast reputed as the favourite haunts of the laf. The word laf is Malagasy.

† Siganus.

squeeze the belly, and apply the matter drawn out, instant relief is the result.

How wondrous are these handy and merciful provisions for ills received! How many, doubtless, there are, which we still know as little about, as of the reason why such creatures are able to hurt man as they do!

A small kind of globe fish is curious. They call it here *totoffe*. I caught one when it was inflated and half full of water, which was visible through its prickly transparent skin, as it would have been in a glass bottle. The creature resisted all my attempts to squeeze any water out, and would not collapse, attempt to force it as I would. It was difficult to believe what I held in my hand was a living creature, you may throw them down on a hard substance, and they bound like a ball, apparently uninjured.

Another small fish is the *lophius*. This creature scrambles up the sides of the low rocks, and lies on them in great numbers. On approaching they dart into the water like so many frogs, of which, indeed, I took them to be some unknown species, till I got close enough to observe them more narrowly.

Sharks, I have said, are not wanting on these shores; but they seldom venture within the reefs. That most curiously formed one of all, the hammer-headed,* frequents these seas.

* Zygæna.

The well-known *torpedo*, a *ray*, which electrifies its victims by means of an apparatus very similar to a galvanic battery, is also common, and is edible.

The herring family is represented by the sardine,* and is as numerous as our plebeian English sprat, and, in like manner, the food of the poorer classes.

Of the soft-bodied fish, *mollusca*, one of the commonest in Mauritius is a most loathsome-looking animal, here called *ourite*; † at the Cape of Good Hope, *catfish*. It is a most disgusting-countenanced creature, but, for all that, a favourite article of food with one class of the people. Another species many people have eaten, as I have, at Genoa, and thought it very good too, goes under the name of *totono*. Our acquaintance here is of a bigger sort, and of a far more repulsive aspect,—more resembling a huge spider, spotted like a toad, with an uneven coarse skin, and armed with innumerable rope-like suckers, radiating from its centre. These writhe and twist, and lash the ground, when the fish is thrown ashore, and grasp most tenaciously everything they come in contact with. By means of these suckers in the sea, the ourite is often a match for the fish which naturally prey upon it. Once within the ourite's clutches, and it is a case of biter bit. All about the villages on the coast

* Clupius Sardina. † Octopus vulgaris.

you come uponhundreds of the ourite, hung up upon large wooden frames to dry in the sun; the frames look like so many great big towel-horses, and when garnished, as if innumerable dark tatters were spread out upon them.

We have a flying fish—a gurnard—but not so ready with its pectoral wings as the commoner kind, so well known to the 'outward-bound;' and one of the first of the many marine wonders at which a novice stares.

The *crustaceans* are exceedingly varied. The crabs and lobsters are of every imaginable colour, and the latter, particularly the *spring lobster*,* of a great size. As far as I have seen they are seldom provided with the formidable claw of their European brethren. I shall never forget one, of which I afterwards partook. I was standing near the kitchen-door when it was brought in. It was to those lobsters which I am better acquainted with, what the most gorgeous macaw is to a grey parrot, an assemblage of the most vivid greens, and blues, and yellows, mottled with reds and browns.

I must not omit the *camaron*—one of the boasts of the place. This species of cray-fish is found in the rivers, and is delicious eating. The curry of it is the curry par excellence. It is not as large as our own largest cray-fish, and often, indeed, only a monster prawn in size.

For the conchologist, Mauritius is a field of

* Palinurus armatus.

the greatest interest. I hear a vast deal of *tritons* and *harps*, and *cowries*, but I neither know nor care about them,—dare I confess it?—excepting as beautiful objects to glance at.

The land-shells are multitudinous, and as I have often picked it up, I must mention a curious fact connected with one sort.

It is a very large species of the snail family, met with at every step all over the island, and called here *couroupas*.* It is reputed to be, like many others of the snails, of great benefit in pulmonary complaints. For this reason a gentleman, who had a wife consumptively inclined in the Seychelles Islands, took some over in a case of bran, about fifty years ago. Before that, the couroupas, now a positive pest in those islands, was not known in them. It is supposed that the bran, which, when the contents had been unpacked, was, naturally, thrown away, was by that time full of eggs, and in this manner the now ineradicable mischief was introduced. It is to be hoped the gentleman's wife was cured at any rate.

There is an immense variety of *echini* or *sea urchins*, displaying the richest colours,—some very large, nearly as big as a sun-flower, which they often resemble otherwise than in shape.

As you skim over the glassy surface of the sea within the reef, among other curious things

* Archatinæ.

you behold lying all over the white sandy bottom, is a sort of inflated ribbon-shaped object. You might imagine these creatures to be a large collection of small leathern pipes, such as are attached to domestic fire-engines, all coiled up together. This repulsive-looking creature is one of the *medusæ*, and, strange enough, bears the specific name of Venus' girdle.* I doubt the beautiful goddess bringing up with her out the sea such a fastening for her transparent draperies.

Interspersed with Venus' girdle is the scarcely less numerous and disgusting sea-cucumber,† not at all unlike that vegetable; more so, however, in its pickled than natural form. The Chinamen dry them and eat them. What will Chinamen not eat? They were formerly exported in great quantities, but are now, I believe, much more used as manure. The man who first gulped one down must have been far more courageous than he who first swallowed an oyster! And I had almost forgotten to mention oysters. They are of a very small kind, and I cannot say I agree with the epicures here in thinking them worth their salt. If you run up ever so small a creek you see them clinging by thousands to the roots of the mangrove trees.

Now for a rapid glance at our insects. If some few were unknown in it Mauritius would be

* Cestus Veneris. † Holothuria.

a Paradise on earth. But we can, at any rate, crow over another tropical country, the West Indies. We are unacquainted with the formidable *jigger*.*

The song of the *cigale* greeted me on my arrival, and took somewhat from the strangeness of the new home, recalling, as it always does, memories of sunny days in Italy ;—those days when

'Time seemed young, and life a thing divine.'

But their song is not so incessant here as there. At sunset, however, they are always awake, and continue their shrill chant late into the night.

The fly family is too well represented for human comfort. In some situations, at certain periods of the year, they are a great torment; but I get tolerably well rid of them by partially darkening the room in which I sit, and letting the full blaze of sunlight flood the adjoining one.

You scarcely ever look up at the ceiling without seeing it studded, one may say, with the little clay nests of the *mason-fly*. Creole brooms, even when 'new,' do not 'sweep clean,' and so these flies are exceedingly common. They collect their building material on a damp road, roll up as much as would make a small pea, and fly off with it to the dwelling in course of erection. The mason-fly has some power or other of paralyzing the insects it feeds on. On the house being fin-

* Pulex penetrans.

ished, provisions are laid up, but the meat is not killed and hung up at once in the larder. It is stored alive, so as to be served fresh and fresh.

The cantharides are very numerous; the green species most intensely brilliant.

Ants are a positive pest. One kind or another swarms in every possible corner.* My cup of coffee often looked as if I had peppered instead of sugared it; and once, having, I suppose, washed my brush with some kind of soap particularly to their fancy, when I put it to my hair, there was a shower of them all over my head. There were myriads of them within the bristles of the brush in the course of an hour. Their sense of smell is something incredible till you have watched them. I have killed a cockroach, more than once, and left it purposely in the middle of the floor. Not an ant was then to be seen in the room where I sat writing. In about five minutes I looked to see the result of my experiment. Long lines of my little friends were marching up in various directions. The dead body was already partially eaten, and shortly after I saw the rest of it being hurried off by thousands of them clinging to its sides.

I once watched the death of a large worm, which was speedily despatched. It wriggled violently for some time, and threw off quantities of the enemy by its violent jerks, but fresh rein-

* Vide Appendix.

forcements were continually brought up, and at last the worm, if not quite stung to death, was sufficiently enfeebled to be dragged away out of sight.

Every other species, however, sinks into insignificance before that of the *white ant*,* the 'Malabar' of the insect world. The Creoles call it *carias*.

I set down the stories I heard of this ant on my arrival as mere exaggerations, but I soon found I was wrong. They build their enormous nest with great rapidity, and generally select for its locality the fork of the finest tree out of doors, and the smartest covered wall, it always seems to me, within. These nests have the appearance of huge black honeycomb sponges when opened. I have seen them as big as a good-sized hamper. In substance they are like the finest sheet-iron. They are so strongly fixed that they even effectually resist the force of a hurricane, and if they fall it is *with* the branch, not *from* it. After some time, the stem and branches of the tree, as far up as the nest, have the appearance of being covered with a kind of net-work. These are the numerous covered galleries or sort of tubular viaducts, communicating from the base of the tree to the nest.

Late in the year they are winged. I lately dined at ——, and they were flying in every-

* Thermes destructor.

body's face across the table. The wood of some trees is distasteful to them,—the heart of teak, and the tree-fern, for instance; the last, I have been told, no insect whatever touches.

I know an instance of some papers being required from one of the military departments. The application was made in vain; the originals had been long since sent to England; the duplicates had been devoured by the white ants.

The treasurer one morning was in a state of utter dismay; on entering his strong room, the canvas bags had been nearly all devoured, and hundreds of pounds in small coin were all spread out pêle-mêle in terrible confusion, necessitating re-counting, an operation neither speedy nor pleasant. This happened since my coming to Mauritius.

An older story is told of a large quantity of dollars being missed, in the time of the East Indian Directors, and an official report being sent home, which laid the blame entirely on the white ants,—not an impossibly just accusation after all, if the dollars were in paper! However, in reply, the Home authorities sent out a quantity of small files, desiring that, for the future, care should be taken to deprive such depredators, frequenting the treasury, of their teeth! Perhaps white ants in those days had their perquisites, like their betters; the loss of dollars, at any rate, was not then, like Paddy's potatoes, too serious

a subject for a joke. It would be different now! Her Majesty's Lords Commissioners of the Treasury are not so prone to be funny!

Mosquitoes I prefer to pass over in silence, if only to forget them as much as possible, till the hour comes round again for irritation of skin and temper—too often, I am afraid.

Our *dragon flies* are very beautiful; one sort especially so. He is clothed in a dark purple coat, and has blood-coloured eyes, and vivid green gossamer wings. I often watch him hovering about a pond in the garden. He is the most thorough-bred looking gentleman I ever saw.

The *mantis* is common too, and of several kinds. The Creoles call it 'cassebol,' and attribute to it somewhat of the spite which Shakespeare's fancy gives to Robin Goodfellow; but they do not 'lurk' in the gossips' bowl, they are more maliciously inclined, for they smash it.

One exceedingly curious species was lately exhibited at a horticultural show. It came from the Seychelles Islands; that is all I know about it. I cannot give its specific name. We all know that many animals, especially of the mantis family, take the form and colour of their particular food, or dwelling-place, often one and the same thing. A small shrub in a pot stood in the middle of a table, and I went purposely to look for this wonderful insect which had been minutely described to me. But although I bent my eyes

most attentively on the plant, it was not till the creature moved that I distinguished it, so strictly was it the fac-simile of the leaf, which was a beautiful one, of a bright green with streaks of metal-like golden yellow.

Our spiders are numberless, and of great variety. It will scarcely be believed when I speak of one that spins a web strong enough to tie down the smaller branches of trees, and effectually curve them. It even catches, I am told, small birds, which, once entangled, rarely escape again. This spider is of 'many colours;' the web is of a yellow silken texture. Its spread is full four feet in diameter. We can many of us remember the famous H. B. caricature of Talleyrand as a spider. I thought of it when I first saw this particular one.

There is another, with white spots, of which you meet with thousands in the woods; their rainbow-tinted webs, in the early morning, sparkle with dew, and the lord of this airy domain himself keeps watch in the centre, and is not unlike a great blotch of ink on a large white sheet.

Tarantulas are my daily companions. They are for ever running over the walls of both my rooms. They are large, black, and hairy. For myself, I respect them on account of their enmity to flies and cockroaches; but my Indian servant wages fierce war with them, and constantly informs me they are 'beaucoup mechants.'

The female is easily known by her tidy habit of carrying her nankeen-coloured cocoon about with her. I one day, by way of experiment, took it away, but not before she had fought bravely to retain it.

Centipedes * are abundant. Do my readers begin to shudder at my list of near neighbours? It is larger here than I have ever before seen it; but, being provided with so many legs, I think it is well to give it every opportunity of using them, which it is always ready to do; but here, again, I receive frequent warnings from my servant for sparing them. However, every animal in Mauritius is, by way of being venomous, himself included, although he does not sting!

We have the scorpion, but not of a very large size. The female sits on her eggs like a bird.

I never saw ticks in such profusion. My poor dog, now far away, has often looked like one of those spiced oranges you see dried, and stuffed full of cloves. One sort is of a dullish scarlet with white spots. This kind often attacks human flesh. I have been once a victim. It was a long time before I found out whence came the irritation I had felt for some days. At last I cut off a lock of hair; there was the tick—'full fathom five'—plunged into me. The only effectual way to extract them is to snip them in two, which I did in this instance; the head withered,

* Scolopendra.

and finally dropped out. This kind is called *Carapate Malgache.*

And now, as a climax to my 'chamber of horrors,' let me come to the cockroach,* to me the most loathsome insect that exists. Nothing is proof against it. Cloth, linen, leather is eaten up in an incredibly short time; in short, I know not what is unpalatable to it. I have not been plagued by them at home, as many people are; but in my office it is different—they get into every drawer, and devour a portion of every paper, and the smell is something too offensive.

The cockroach, however, as an entomological study, is exceedingly curious and interesting. The provision the female makes for the concealment of her eggs is singular. It is necessary, in order that they may be hatched, that they should have light and air; the eggs, as I read, are consequently 'attached, by a glutinous liquid, in some angle, often the panel of the door;' but to obviate the dangers of so exposed a position, the wary mother covers them over with some matter or other so nearly the colour of the surrounding surface, that her deposit is scarcely to be discerned, unless carefully sought for.

The cockroach, like almost every other production of nature, is believed, in Mauritius, to possess valuable medicinal properties. For this reason, Madame ——, whom I know slightly,

* Blatta orientalis.

informed me that she encourages them in her house. I should say a little encouragement must go a great way. Applied in the form of a poultice, she added, they are a certain cure for lockjaw, an illness said to be very common among the Creoles.

As far as personal observation goes, I should imagine we are poor in butterflies. One or two are very beautiful. From a recent report, however, I learn that many natives of Madagascar have become so numerous as to be oftener seen than those which are indigenous. I do not think they come as high up as this.

I must perforce mention the *pou blanc*,* one of the planter's special scourges. The injury done by this creature, in size so insignificant, for some years is scarcely credible. It was first observed in 1852. It then attacked almost every kind of tree. Two years afterwards appeared another, hitherto unknown, insect of the coleoptera genus, and the pou blanc was observed to decrease rapidly; but, although not so much as at first, the canes still suffer immensely from its ravages, and everything is being done to discover some means of effectually extirpating it.

In connection with the pou blanc, the other great insect-destroyer of the cane suggests

* *Pou à poche blanche*, said to belong to the genus coccus, of which the cochineal is a member—if so, decidedly the 'mauvais sujet' of the family.

itself—the borer. When I first arrived in Mauritius I heard of nothing else, but whether from the novelty being over, or from the animal's decrease, I have certainly heard less of lamentation over its havoc of late. Its larvæ perforate the stalk of the cane, which becomes good for nothing. Mr —— showed me some of them, which had been taken from a clump of canes in the very centre of his field, and of which he burnt down some hundreds round about those tainted. The rest of the field was healthy. The moth is brown.

During a drive I once saw several hundred acres utterly abandoned; arid and stunted canes, choked up in addition by weeds, allowed to run riot by necessitated neglect.—Such is the havoc of the borer!

It is said we owe it to Ceylon. It was first known here in 1849, and was then entirely confined to the plantations on the sea-coast, where the finest sugar was grown; but it gradually crept upward, and is now everywhere. A premium has been offered by the government for any discovery which may rid the island of it.

With the *Bug* tribe my readers will readily dispense, as we could more literally; for we have them. One is most formidable, it flies,—think of that! and attacks by night; this is the *Surinam bug* of the West Indies, and has most probably come here in some imported cargo.

We have the tiny hopping creature generally named in conjunction with the above, and, as may be supposed, where blacks predominate it swarms, unless proper precaution be taken against it. Few persons are aware, perhaps, that if you shut up a room so infested, and strew it with common fennel, in an hour or two it is free from them. I learnt this at the Cape of Good Hope, where fennel grew wild in abundance, and I never knew the receipt fail, there, at any rate. Of the insects that 'sheath'* their wings, we have a great variety.

I will mention one or two only, for it is time my pen's pace should slacken. One is our little friend the *Ladybird,* who seems in this instance to have flown 'far away' from home. Another species is the insect I have alluded to that has only appeared since the arrival of the *pou blanc* and done such good service in destroying it. No one knows whence it has come. It is clad much more soberly than our older and more brilliant acquaintance in Europe, whom it much resembles but is rather larger. Another is the *Rhinoceros Beetle,* called by the Creoles *Bœuf Banane.* It would be a terrific and formidable creature in Lilliput! The *Goat Beetle,* called here *Moutouc* is another of our domestic enemies. It is in almost every house. Many a chair in the course of the

* Coleoptera, from the two Greek words 'coleos,' a sheath, and 'pteron,' a wing.

year succumbs to its perseverance. You may often distinctly hear it sawing away, as you occupy the very seat it is doing its best to make fall under you. It is vulgarly called the carpenter, but cannot exactly be said to work *for* you.

Another is a very singular creature as regards its development. It is found with the nut encased in the kernel-shell of the mango. I do not remember ever splitting one open and failing to see at least one of these insects, in a more or less advanced state of existence. The egg is deposited in the ovary of the blossom, and so grows with the growth of the fruit, without injuring it.

Mauritius produces one wasp, the *Mouche Jaune*, a very bilious-looking creature. It has a long, lanky body, and excepting its colour is unlike our 'old English gentleman,' whose black stripes it has completely doffed.

I was particularly favoured with the company of the Mouche Jaune in my first home. It built on a tree opposite my bed-room window, and I could closely watch the increase of the brown-paper-looking nests. The inhabitants of these successive habitations were, probably, branches of a great and distinguished neighbouring family, who had left the ancestral roof and set up for themselves; a long line of forefathers must have resided between the planks of the house outside

my dressing-room, and must have been established there for years. I have seen hundreds flying in and out in five minutes. There was a continual warfare going on between them and me; and it never was quite decided which on the whole had the best of it. They sometimes took an unfair advantage of me I thought, making a sudden descent upon me when I was in my bath. At last I had my towel ready at hand, which proved a formidable weapon, knocking down tens together. The nests, with the larvæ, are considered a delicacy by many Creole epicures, and are even sold in the market.

The *Mole Cricket*, attracted, I suppose, by the lamp, flumps about at particular seasons, running in its peculiar hurried crooked way over the table-cloth—our table indeed is often a strange sight, and I doubt even that Messrs Kirby and Spence would quite have enjoyed their evening repast here.

There is a great variety of moths, which also at dinner-time favour you with their company uninvited, too often and too much. Some of them are most beautiful; of the *Death's-head* and *Hawk* you see numbers.

Let me not pass over what in Mauritius one may really call a domestic animal; our cheerful little *Gecko*. There are two species, often confounded with the lizard, of which latter we have but one kind. They are considerably flatter than

the lizard, and change colour like the chameleon. The touch is disagreeable from its extreme chilliness, but I have got quite fond of one, which lives in my bed-room, and I really fancy at times it knows me; for while scuttling over the wall he will sometimes slip down, and boldly stare at me. They deposit their pretty little eggs in all sorts of odd corners—a key-hole seems to be considered particularly snug, and as keys of inside doors here are after awhile invariably lost, this shows sagacity in the gecko, for it is a tolerably safe place. The egg is the size of a small pea. The gecko which lives in my room is of a dullish brown; the other kind I often find on the palm-trees, or oftener perhaps on the brilliant crimson flower of a wild pine-apple plant common in the island. Here it loves to bask, and will lie quite still glittering and panting; but it is easily frightened, which is not so often the case with its relation.

This out-o'-doors one is of a brilliant green, with a turquoise blue tint, especially near the tail, and profusely dotted with bright scarlet. If you catch him, these gorgeous colours lose their intensity for a time. The gecko has a peculiar chirp, not unlike that of a small bird: it puzzled me for some weeks to know whence it came. They are the most pugnacious little creatures among themselves I ever saw, with apparently very decided rules on the subject of precedence;

great sticklers, in short, for etiquette. I have watched two meet in a narrow place—they stop; stare and defiantly twinkle their bright eyes at each other; then comes a regular set-to, till one yields the 'pas,' generally dropping from the branch to the ground, and scudding away as if to hide its humiliation.

Well, there! I have done. Will my sketch of Fauna be thought too long? It is far from complete,—it should be a well-versed pen to do it justice, whereas mine only sketches superficially.

As we study the habits of animals we are more and more reminded, I think, that God never intended all the good and beautiful things in this world for man only; and that we must be content to share them with the inferior beings he has thought fit also to create, and to place by the side of our proud selves. We certainly have learnt, and may daily learn, many lessons of wisdom from them, although the exact usefulness of several may often puzzle us.

APPENDIX.

ANTS.

THE intelligent author of 'Fauna' in the Mauritian almanac, from whom I have both obtained much information and borrowed largely, states that there are but two indigenous species of ants in Mauritius—both black.

A third species—a red ant—has made its appearance within a few years, and is supposed to have been imported in guano. This kind is one of the most voracious insects in the world, and as an instance of its voracity the following case is related. A cheese of seven pounds' weight was deposited in a shop, and was placed on a jar in a plate of water. This precaution was taken on Saturday night. On Monday morning the cheese was reduced from seven pounds' weight to two; but the form and size, exteriorly, was the same!

Sunday had not been a day of rest to the ants, if it had been one of feasting.

The numbers however of this particular ant have been lately greatly diminished; another species having made its appearance, whence no

one knows, which is a cannibal, and devours the red one without pity.

Our author further remarks that these creatures are less numerous and less destructive in Mauritius than in most tropical countries. I can only then say, God help the inhabitants of the others.

APPENDIX.

WHITE ANTS.

THE accompanying remarks, extracted from a local newspaper, may be interesting to some of my readers.

'Mr F. Dick called the attention of the Society to the active principle which would probably be found in the nest and exuviæ of an insect belonging to the order of "Neuropters;" and known in every hot quarter of the globe, where it commits great ravages; viz., the *Caria*, or white ant; "*Thermes destructor*," of Fabricius.

'It is well known that a few years ago it was made use of as an infusion or decoction for the treatment of certain nervous affections, particularly epilepsy, and that if no cure were effected, the condition of the patient was improved. Mr Dick drew the inference that the matters extracted from the wood by the Caria itself, might contain some principles similar to those which are found in chloroform or other anerstetics. But, the medical question apart, Mr Dick was desirous that the analysis of the nest should be

made, in order to ascertain what substances are extracted from the wood, which might lead to the discovery of a means of arresting the ravages of this destructive insect. Mr Fleurot was requested by the Society to undertake the task; his analysis has thrown a broad light on the subject, and furnished results very curious and interesting.

'It has proved the presence, in remarkable proportions and in rather considerable quantities, of formic acid in combination with iron in the head and mandibles of the insect. Mr Fleurot is of opinion that the sedative effects of the Caria's nest are due to the combination of the iron and formic acid, which produces a formate of iron. The result leaves no doubt as to its value in the treatment of certain nervous affections, and Mr Fleurot considers that it may be ranked as a new therapeutic agent.

'The analysis of the nest and of the insect left no traces of soluble salts or common salt so generally diffused, and which is found in all animal substances. Mr Fleurot draws the inference that the nature of the insect being antipathetical to common salt, it may be combated with that substance. He traced a circle of salt, in which he enclosed some white ants, and they did not dare to cross the barrier. New facts supported his assertion. He has been informed that in some damp cellars, where the white ants

caused great destruction amongst the casks of wine and beer, they had been entirely driven away by strewing a layer of common salt under the barrels. He also ascertained that salt-meat casks have never been known to be touched by them.

'Mr Fleurot has thus established that common salt is the best means hitherto discovered of preservation from the attacks of the white ants. Several products of the analysis of the *Thermes destructor*, and a magnified drawing of the insect, were presented to the Society.

'Mr Fleurot's paper attracted the lively interest of the members. It has established two important points: 1st, The discovery of a new therapeutic substance—formate of iron—with which it is hoped to combat with success certain nervous affections that are so common in our enervating climate; and 2nd, The discovery of an easy mode of driving away the insect.

'On the other hand, Mr Beyts has communicated to the Society an extract from the "Gazette of India," dated 8th October, 1864, of a letter by Dr E. Bonavia, honorary secretary to the Agricultural and Horticultural Society. "In the site," he says, "where the central jail is erected, the white ants exist in unlimited numbers, and they eat through the plaster in order to get at the cow-dung, so that the walls require to be constantly re-plastered.

'"Some time ago, Mr Marshall, the jailer, was getting some floor made from the fibres of the American aloe (Agave Americana), and he found white ants did not touch mats made from this fibre. On the contrary, they always destroyed mats made from other materials.

'"I then asked him what use he made of the pulp which is separated from the fibre of the aloe leaves. He said it was thrown away. It struck me that it might be very profitably used for mixing up with the clay and cow-dung used for plastering the jail walls, as then probably the white ants would not touch the plaster. The experiment was tried and quite answered the purpose. Plaster which was impregnated with juice and pulp of the aloe leaves has stood for months, and is not yet touched by white ants, while the plaster of walls free from aloe juice becomes covered with white ants shortly after it is put on.'"

CHAPTER XXII.

FLORA.

FLORA and Fauna always trip along hand in hand together; so, having made my reader superficially acquainted with one goddess, I must needs introduce the other. I pass some of my pleasantest hours here in the study of the Flora. I have already made a pretty good collection of seeds.

No visits do I enjoy more than those to Ll——. This is altogether I think the most charming residence in the island; exquisite scenery without, within refinement, congenial tastes, and English home-comforts.

At Ll—— I indulge to the full my love of flowers, and when Mauritius shall be a 'far away' land for me, as one day, before long, it must be, often shall I recall with pleasure early strolls, when the sun was not yet fierce, among Mrs ——'s well-stocked flower-beds, and along the winding path down to the fernery in the ravine, the roar of the cascade in my ears, the spray of the falling water often sprinkling me, and darling little ——

frisking about like an antelope, as lovely a bud as any, and, happy child, as wild a one too very often! Here in all truth is a garden wherein

> 'grow
> Far more than herbs and flowers,—
> Kind thoughts, contentment, peace of mind,
> And joy for weary hours!'

Our 'Flora' proper is, I believe, very comprehensive; nevertheless, like her sister Fauna, Flora has likewise consented to borrow largely from other countries. A great variety of exotics have been introduced, one time or another, from every part of the world, and many of them have taken such complete possession of the new soil, that, to an ignoramus, as I am, they may easily pass for indigenous. India, China, the West Indies, South America, Golden Australia, and that world of islands to the North, have each lastingly inscribed their names on the pages of our herbal.

The *Mango*,* the *Custard-Apple*,† the *Guava*,‡ are found growing wild; the *Shaddock* § and others of the *Citron* family are in the woods. One most popular vegetable, the *Chouchou*,‖ bids fair to rank as a weed before long. It runs along the ground, and up and over every neighbouring bush

* Mangifera from India.
† Anona squamosa from South America.
‡ Psidium from West Indies.
§ Citrus decumana from India. ‖ Sechium edule.

and tree. Its native country is, I believe, Brazil. The species now generally eaten, was introduced a few years back by Mr ——, still living in Mauritius. As a salad it is delicious; as a creeper with its large green pear-shaped prickly fruit, innumerable tendrils, and broad leaves, one would readily give it a prominent place in a European green-house.

Few spots on the face of the earth can be more favoured, in respect of climate, than this volcanic offspring of the Indian Ocean. By living higher up or lower down in the island, you have a complete diversity of temperature. Flora and Pomona may sit down together and twine into their garlands the flowers and fruits of the four quarters of the world!

To the Botanical Garden, the floral repository where you may see them all, indigenous and exotic, growing luxuriantly, I will now proceed. It is in the village of 'Pamplemoasses,' the Richmond of Port Louis. You may reach it by railway in half an hour. The garden itself covers some sixty acres, and it would be difficult, I imagine, to find a more interesting collection of plants the world over, than are exhibited here. There are of course Botanical gardens, the catalogues of which are more complete, thanks to larger funds. The one here is not a 'Kew' nor a 'Jardin des Plantes,' but when you wander through the well-kept grounds at Pamplemoasses, the cloudless

brilliantly-blue sky is overhead. As you look up there is no glazed roof, however lofty, to remind you that you are breathing an artificial atmosphere, and that thanks to that alone all about you is of luxuriant growth.

Let us go in! Whichever way you look, the rarest plants greet you. There are none of the pigmies of northern climates. The giants of the tropics meet us here at every step, in all their natural and unthwarted vigour. Come and saunter down this broad walk, between those lines of palms which form a gallery of four hundred feet. See how those wide plots of ground on either side are overflowing with the most gorgeous flowering shrubs and riotous climbing plants. It is useless trying; no words can give any real idea of the beauty of such a glorious confused heap of gigantic vegetation. Imagine a tree that might* stand alone in an English park, and cut no bad figure as to size, loaded with deep orange clusters; each single flower of the bunch as big as the expanded one of our common Magnolia. Place near this in fancy the following clump. A broadly spreading tree, affording the completest shade, yet with the delicate foliage of the Mimosa. It is covered with innumerable tufts of a large crimson pea-flower, of so deep a shade, that the tree takes its common name from

* Bignonia (I believe) speciosa.

it; the flaming* tree, flamboyant. To look down from a height, as I often do when driving into town, upon a number of these in their full splendour, is a sight of marvellous beauty. Another† is very similar to it, but the flowers are less showy, being a rich mixture of red and brown. The *Sang Dragon* ‡—dragons' blood—speaks for itself. Another tree very common, often to be seen growing by the road-side, thickly covered with flowers, also pea-shaped, and of a vivid lilac, bears enormous pods. I never have ascertained the name. The *Bonnet Carré*§ is named from the giant shape of its flower. It is exactly that of the well-known ecclesiastical head-dress of the Roman Church, which you see stuck on the tops of the heads of fat dignitaries squeezed into cathedral stalls for Vespers. The culminating tassel is dispensed with in the flower, which is very large, and of a white, delicately tinted. The leaf, neither in shape nor size, is very unlike that of a prize cabbage at a Horticultural show in Europe. But perhaps the most beautiful of all is the *Dillenia,*|| not a common tree at all in Mauritius, although, wherever I have seen it, it grows well. The leaf somewhat

* Poinciana regia from Madagascar.

† Colvillea racemosa from Madagascar.

‡ Pterocarpus draco from Guadaloupe.

§ Barringtonia speciosa of India.

|| Dillenia speciosa from the Moluccas.

resembles that of the Spanish chestnut considerably magnified; you may pass it when in full flower, and not see so much as a bud. Its glories are hidden from public gaze, and are only for those who choose to seek them—creep under it, and hundreds of big, white bells are suspended over head, for the display of which, may be, the tree arches its branches, so as to form a kind of cupola. The delicacy of the white of its grand blossoms is exquisite, and within the corolla there is such a collection of large stamens, all so thickly powdered with their golden pollen, that it seems as if a second flower grew within the petals.

What a bouquet I have made from all these trees, but fit alone for a queen of Brobdignag!

The first plant with a more than usually strange look, strange in the sense of oddity, which you see on entering the gardens, is the *Baobab** or sour gourd of Senegal. A specimen of this most curious tree in Senegal is supposed to be the oldest member of the vegetable world now growing upon the face of the earth. The enormous size of the mere baby, we have here, may give you some idea of the ancestral tree in Senegal, which is stated to measure ninety feet in circumference.

An eye, as mine was till late, unused to see the plants I had hitherto only read of, growing

* Adansonia digitata, called from its discoverer Mr Adanson.

freely in the open air, is at first quite bewildered. It was not till after frequent visits that I seemed to take in the full measure of their marvels.

See yonder! that is a grove of *Nutmeg** trees. The small yellow fruit is in shape like a plum, out of which comes the kernel so famous in culinary economy. The nutmeg, as we call it, is very beautiful when first taken out, being of a dark purple, with a fibrous net-work over it of the deepest and most vivid rose-colour. This fades after a few days' exposure to the air, settles down into a snuff-coloured brown, and takes its place in the spice-box under the familiar name of *mace*.

Near at hand are clove† and cinnamon‡ trees, and the ginger plant§ cannot be far off, for the root of which you have not to dig deeply.

'Cinnamon and ginger, nutmegs and cloves,'

If they do not give you 'a jolly red nose,' they are growing close under it.

There, too, are the *camphor* tree‖ and the *pepper*¶ tree, and a host of others from 'aromatic climes and spicy shores.'

It would be a long day's work to count the different species of palms, if I confined myself only to those that are to be seen growing in

* Myristica moscata.
† Caryophillus aromaticus.
‡ Cinnamomum nitidum.
§ Zingiber officinale.
‖ Camphora officinarum.
¶ Piper nigrum.

Mauritius, one more graceful than the other.* Some of them have the very slenderest stems of sixty and seventy feet high, running up, straight as an arrow, to their umbrella-shaped heads. Others in comparison are stumpy,—as for instance, the Arab's 'bread of the desert;' the *date palm*,† but more especially so the *sago palm*,‡ so well known in English nurseries under the disguise of an insipid pudding. The sago trees' manner of flowering is curious; the flower, somewhat like a large sun-flower in shape, is wholly of a sort of buff colour; the petals are large, high, and numerous, the single blossom expanding in the very heart of the fronds, which seem to bend backwards purposely to allow room for the display of this beautiful formation. Of the *raffia*§ I have already spoken, of its branches, each single one in size a tree in itself; and of its suicidal seeding, when it drops its large mass of fruit and scatters seed, but does not live to see the new tree grow up. The *areca* species is numerous; two deserve separate mention. One of these || produces the well-known *betel* nut, to the natives of India pretty much what whisky is to Paddy. It does not seem certain, however, whether its

* Lindley tells us there are upwards of 1000 known, and many, probably, yet to be discovered. A curious fact is that of no palm ever having been found in South Africa.

† Phœnix dactylifera.

‡ Sagus lævis.

§ Sagus raffia.

|| Areca catechu of India.

intoxicating quality is derived from the actual betel nut itself, or from the *piper* leaf, in which it is rolled up to be chewed. I asked an Indian woman, whose mouth was full, to let me taste some she held in her hand. It was exceedingly pungent, and, I thought, very nasty, and I spat it out so quickly that the woman laughed aloud. I fancied there was a strong, although diminutive, resemblance between the inside of her red mouth and that of the hippopotamus I saw yawn one day on emerging from his bath in the Zoological Gardens of the Regent's Park.

The other *areca** is here called the 'Chou *palmist,*' of which, again, there are varieties, all indigenous. Many a beautiful individual tree is sacrificed to the love of good eating. It is killed by the cutting of its single 'cabbage,' which is the leader of the tree, and nothing more or less than a roll of tender fronds still undeveloped. I must confess that the salad made of this palm is one of the many delicious things which, having once tasted, one longs to eat again.

Another palm, called here the *cayenne palm*,† produces an assemblage of fronds of grander dimensions than any other, the raffia excepted; and it is, perhaps, the most beautiful, upwards, of all. I say upwards, because the trunk always appears to me as a downright deformity, especially when the tree is of a good size. I scarcely know how

* Areca lutescens. † Oreodoxa regia.

to describe it. Take a boy's peg-top, and set it on the ground, point upwards, and magnify its size by indefinite hundreds, and you will have some idea of its odd shape. Another kind, growing in the Botanical Garden,* is sometimes called the *gingerbread palm*, the brown mealy nut having a strong resemblance to that child-loved cake. Then there is the *fan-leaved*,† one species of which is of a 'monster' size,—you might almost thatch a cottage with a single leaf; and the *bambou palm*,‡ a thicket of slim golden rods and green feathers; and last, not least, that kind§ so familiar to us from the monkey-featured nut. The word 'coco' is said to be a corruption of the Portuguese 'macoco,' which again originates in 'Macacus,' the generic for monkey. The pointed end of the nut, with its three black spots, sufficiently accounts for such nomenclature. The coco, I need scarcely tell you, grows pretty well everywhere in its own climate; but it especially loves the sea-shore, where you see it bending over the water, and often reflected as on the surface of a mirror. The uses to which this tribe is put, especially the last sort, are, as you know, hundred-fold. Oil and wine flow from it; flour and sugar are drawn out of it; solid food is gathered from it; habitations are built; weapons of defence, and utensils for a hundred domestic purposes, are manufactured from one

* Hyphœne Thebaica.
† Latania rubra.
‡ Hyophorbe Indica.
§ Cocos nucifera.

part or the other; threads for sowing, oars for rowing (the midrib), are all at hand, wherever a 'cocotier' grows; and no one, who has not seen a grove of them, can imagine the beauty they lend to the landscape. Backed by a sky red with sunset, you have a picture of infinite beauty before you. 'Arrack,' a drink well known in the tropics, is nothing more than the saccharine juice of the flower and stem fermented; and the still more widely popular 'toddy' comes from the wounded spathes. This has its medicinal as well as its intoxicating properties.

Look at that large bush! that is the *cacao**—the food of the gods—our *cocoa* tree. Did you ever see anything more dissimilar to the cocoa nut? yet I have heard them talked of, by an untravelled Londoner, as one and the same plant. In the now neglected coffee plantation at ——, a spot of very great beauty, almost entirely left to itself, and revelling, therefore, in the luxuriance of uncontrolled tropical vegetation, I saw many of these cacaos with the ripe fruit upon them. In shape it is more like a cucumber than anything else, but ribbed. The rind is of a dark red, and of a peculiar shade, and of a substance resembling 'papier maché,' the fruit, in short, if lying on a table, might pass for one of the many cunningly-devised bonbonnières, usually exhibited in the window of a French sugar-plum shop. Closely

* Theobroma cacao.

packed within, as in a melon, lie the seeds or beans, which, when ground into paste, sweetened, and perfumed with vanilla, compose the all-popular 'chocolat.' The tree, not unlike our own cherry-tree, grows often to the height of twenty feet; but, I imagine, only in its native country; certainly not in that lovely wilderness of my friend Monsieur ——. In Nicaragua, where it is cultivated for exportation, the manner of planting it is singular. Between every two 'cacaos' is placed another tree—the coral tree—twice its height, for protection and shelter. This is aptly called 'madre cacao,'—mother cocoa-tree. The seeds I have described are employed as a medium of exchange in small trading transactions, a proof of their hard and durable nature. In Nicaragua, then, it is literally true that money may be picked from the trees, beating, in one respect, the produce of the gold diggings, for the process of coinage is dispensed with. 'Cæsar's superscription' is not there, but Nature's.

In Caraccas a cacao plantation is called a *walk*.

I think I was as much struck with the 'lianes,' or climbing plants, on my first arrival, as anything. They are so universally luxuriant, and more characteristic of a tropical forest than all the other leafy things in it. As I am writing, I can, by lifting my head, see three or four as beautiful as any. They would take complete possession of

my verandah in a few weeks, but for the frequent use of my garden knife. Among them are two species of tecoma,* one of which I do not remember to have met with till I came here—pink in colour.

A very common creeper, but not the less lovely for that, has a large Ipomæa-shaped, creamy-white flower.† It bears no end of 'vulgar' names—Moon-creeper, Liane de Marie, Manche de la Vierge, &c. Its growth is wonderfully rapid. I consequently sowed seeds of it abundantly in every direction in my first garden, not only for the beauty of it, but for the purpose of hiding various unsightly deposits of pots and pans, always most ostentatiously exhibited at one end of the house by our black cook, 'Belle de Nuit' by name. On a bush of a good size, overrun by the moon-creeper, I have counted nearly a hundred blossoms fully expanded. The following incident will give no bad idea of the effect it can make. I had strictly forbidden the display of any of Belle de Nuit's, or the other servants' garments on certain plants growing near our verandah, and upon which our eating-room immediately looked. One morning, soon after daybreak, I went to the end of the 'cour' to speak to the coachman, and, on turning back, I beheld, as I thought, a greater assemblage of freshly-washed linen than ever. Such a flagrant disre-

* Tecoma jasmenoides. † Posana paniculata.

gard of frequent peremptory orders required instant remark on my part; and I walked along stringing together every angry word I could think of in Creole; when, on coming closer, the obnoxious objects took the form of innumerable white flowers, which, it being scarcely more than twilight, were still open and perfuming the air most deliciously. As the sun goes down this creeper begins to blow. As the sun rises, it shuts up, the blossoms droop, hang flaccidly along their green string, and wither. Hence the name of moon-creeper. I have sat close to one and watched it expand. The bud, as yet closed, suddenly quivers, then by degrees it seems to be inflated, the petals cling together by their trembling tips as long as they can; in a few moments they fly apart, and the glorious full flower is before you, and breathing the most exquisite odour. I do not know if it be a distinction of the sexes, but I have picked from the same mass both quite black and quite white seeds. There are two kinds of the moon-creeper, an annual and a perennial, but otherwise not, I believe, to be distinguished.

In great contrast to the 'Liane de Marie,' is a vividly crimson-flowered creeper, of a diminutive size,* with a leaf something like that of our greenhouse plant, which children so dearly love to poke their small fingers into and test its sensitiveness. The Creoles call it '*amourette*.' It is

* Quamoclit coccineum.

a native of St Domingo. I have never seen it out of a garden, but there is another with which the hedges are at one time of year covered, which you might easily mistake for it; the colour is as brilliant, although the leaves are quite of another sort. But suppose, after all, my readers know my 'amourette;' this must be the case with many of the plants I may name—the *Stefanotis* * for instance. With this many are well acquainted, but they have never perhaps seen a whole verandah covered with its white waxy clusters; nor yards and yards of green ropes knotted like a boatswain's 'line'—the knots being bright-blue golden-eyed flowers. Such I saw† hanging down from the tops of some dozen lofty trees, and waving within my reach at Monsieur S——'s, when on a visit there.

Reader! have you ever seen a blood-streaked Ipomea‡ running over the ground on the very edge of the sea, which seemed to be creeping up timidly, but amorously, to kiss this superb-looking beauty; or another one thickly studding the banks of a ravine with stars of the brightest yellow,‡ entangling itself with everything near it? Have you ever been forced to push aside a dark dangling mass of deep purple buds§ to get entrance into a friend's house, as I often have had to do

* Stefanotis floribunda. † Thunbergia grandiflora.
‡ Ipomea, I suppose; I know not the name.
§ Ipomea Horsfallia.

at pretty C——, where a bright smile and a hearty welcome always greet every one who lifts this arras of Nature's own weaving. Have you stood 'bouche béante' and looked up at a creeper of such an enormous size that it is like a boa-constrictor twisting itself round a victim to strangle it? Huge red and yellow clusters blazed forth from the one I saw. The thick foliage of the tree* told plainly enough that it endured well the tight embrace of the serpent.

There were bushes of the golden *allamanda* † and its mauve-flowered sister, and masses of the pretty pink-blossomed *flowering guava*,‡ and thickets of a Chinese creeper§—a very galaxy of white stars, as I passed on. If you had ever seen all this during half an hour's stroll in the open air, you would better understand my enthusiasm.

I only wish we could stroll along together amidst such beauties as these every day! Well, at any rate, slip your arm into mine in an imaginary walk, and let us go on. I have not done yet. We will not mind a little confusion of seasons; it is really difficult to remember here when a plant is in flower, and when it is not. Nor must I forget our fruits, although here I do think, on the whole, we come very far behind Europe.

'What tree is that?' I hear you say, 'with that fruit hanging over it, which reminds me of

* Butea superba of India.
† Allamanda cathartica.
‡ Lazerstromia Indica.
§ Bauhinia corymbosa.

the arbutus berry, only it is larger, rougher, and of a browner red?' It is the Chinese *litchi.* Were there more of the fruit and less of the stone, it would be one of the most delicious fruits in the world.* The ball inside is more like the jellied part of a plover's egg than anything else. The muscadine flavour is quite exquisite, but 'le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle,' for the first bite brings you to the hard kernel. There is very little to eat of it.

One of my favourites, perhaps the greatest, is the golden-fleshed *mango,* so luscious, so ambrosial, the gods must have eaten it! The taste of turpentine one hears so much of, is found in no good sort. The tree, with its fruit hanging on it, is a beautiful object, and as far as the eye goes, the nearest counterpart of it I have met with has been on Aladdin's bush in a pantomime, when he gets into the enchanted garden.

Pine-apples, without being restricted to a niggardly slice, as at home, one never seems to be without. I do not know how to describe the *alligator pear,*† also known by the name of the *avocat pear.* If eaten in the nick of time, it is one of the most delicious morsels men can put into their mouths. Can you fancy butter made of filberts? That is no bad description of its flavour and substance. It is eaten with salt or sugar; but I think, myself,

* Nephelium litchi.

† Persea gratissima, a native of Tropical America.

you might as well prefer sugar with nuts. It is about the size and shape of a pear; one variety I have seen is round. It is of a dull green, and does not make the same show as the mango on the dessert table. Like many other things higher up on Nature's ladder, it is unassuming, and superior. The custard apple, called here '*atte*,'* is, to my mind, very insipid and like so much pomatum; but I am greatly in the minority. Another species of the same family is the '*Cœur de bœuf*,'† called so from its close resemblance to a bullock's heart. It is, I think, better than the other, and that is the best I can say of it. There is another species which, I find, has never fruited in Mauritius. I ate it once at St Helena, and thought it then delicious, the substance that of a melon, with a sort of pine-apple cream over it. This last is a native of South America.‡

But come along! Never mind the sun. These *bread trees* § and numerous sorts of broad-leafed *bananas* ‖ will shade us. Try and lift one of those clusters of their fruit; you will hardly do it. They are cut green, you see, and when they ripen off the tree, are never so highly-flavoured as when they are allowed to come naturally to their maturity. But precaution is often forced upon us here by hands that pick and steal. The banana is said to

* Arona squamosa. † Arona reticulata.
‡ Arona cherimolia.
§ Artocarpus incisa. ‖ Musa.

yield a larger supply of human food, on a given piece of ground, than any other known vegetable. I used a clump of them by the side of the river for my dressing-room, when I bathed, where I first lived, and a scarlet cardinal would sometimes come and perch there. That was a picture, I think!

Do you know what that insignificant-looking shrub is? With time and patience, and boiling water too, you might have a cup of *tea* from it. How grave and sombre is its aspect by the side of these two gorgeously-clad children of Madagascar, a country that must be unequalled in the world for brilliantly-flowered plants. Those carmine* tufts are positively dazzling, and how lovely is the contrast to yonder delicate mauve bunches! † The green pod hanging on the latter like a pointed cucumber, is worth examining; the packing of the seed within this inner shell, which looks like a roll of cinnamon, is one of the most beautiful natural arrangements I have ever seen. Open it carefully, for each grain has silken wings, although you do not see one till you have disturbed them, so carefully are they doubled up beneath. Once displaced, off they fly, to scatter beauty through the woods. What would one not give to see such marvels growing about the ground, as luxuriantly as brambles on one of our English commons.

* Poivrea coccinea.

† Cryptostegia Madagascariensis.

I do not wonder one feels inclined to stop before that heap of spiky pyramids and clustering silver bells. The shape reminds one of the old-fashioned 'corals' of high-born babies a century back. It is a thicket of '*Adam's needle*,'* of which I remember single puny specimens in pots on the Villareale walls at Naples. Here, in the tropics, one may find it a formidable obstacle to advance, when wandering from a prescribed path.

That blaze of an indescribable red is an assemblage of the Mexican *poincettia*.† It is to be seen, more or less, all over the world now, but not as here, where you find it growing six feet high.

Those odd, stiff, petrified-looking branches, rising behind the poincettia, belong to the *frangipane*.‡ If the leaves were off, it might pass for a gigantic hat-stand, or a collection of small deer's antlers stuck on a pole. But pick one of its great jessamine-shaped blossoms. The petals are creamy-white, and thick in substance, as if cut out from the finest kid-leather. See, too, how it is powdered round the eye with deep gamboge. The perfume is as exquisite as the form of the flower. There is a red one,§ but I have never seen it in flower. Those dark bronze-tinted leaves belong to a variety of '*bois de chandelle*,'‖

* Yucca gloriosa. † Poinciana pulcherrima.
‡ Plumeria alba.
§ Plumeria rubra. ‖ Dracœnia ferrea.

as the Creoles call it. Those with variegated streaks of rose, or green, and yellow, are different species of the same. They all form beautiful clumps in a garden, when planted together. Several are indigenous. By the side is the *brugmancia*,* with its appropriate specific name of 'sweet-smelling.' It can scarcely be called anything here but a tree, so unlike is it in size to our comparatively dwarfish green-house specimens. On yonder one you may count its great snowy trumpet-shaped flowers by hundreds. They have a curious name for it in Mauritius, 'Trompette du jugement dernier.'

The *bouganvillia* is almost a weed with us. The species of a colour † quite peculiar to itself, neither lilac nor pink, but the most brilliant mixture of the two, is far prettier when left to grow on the ground in a clump than as a creeper. The stem is not sufficiently flexible for it to be in the latter shape. The dark-red ‡ variety is very beautiful too. This altogether striking plant is a native of South America, whence it has made its way to Madeira and elsewhere, where it is much cherished. It grows freely in that island, but not as it does here on ours.

* Brugmancia suaveolens. † Bouganvillia glabra.

‡ Bougauvillia Braziliensis. Bougainville touched at Port Louis in November, 1768, on his return from his voyage round the world. We may presume he left behind him the seeds of this beautiful plant.

Let us sit down for a few minutes, but under which of these two great trees? This, with its innumerable hanging branches, if so we can call them, each before long to become a trunk itself, taking root like the parent-tree of them all, is the *banyan*,* or god-tree of India. A single tree is known to have covered the space of two thousand feet in circumference. I can easily believe it. This other near it, the *Jack tree*,† is a singular-looking object too, in another way, from its enormous fruit, which grows out from any part of stem or branch, and is attached to them by the very shortest possible stalk. The leaf is not unlike that of the large-leafed magnolia we have out of doors in England. When of a full growth it is a noble-looking tree—of the same family as the bread tree. The fruit is green, and not wholly dissimilar from the above, inside or out, but coarser. It is, in short, the workhouse loaf by the side of the white one! The lower class of blacks eat it, and do not mind its offensive smell. The size of the fruit is often that of two of their own ugly heads together.

One of the commonest, and at the same time most showy, family of plants here, is that of the *hibiscus*. The variety of colour is marvellous. Scarlet,‡ rose and pink,§ yellow and orange,‖

* Ficus Indica.
† Artocarpus integrifolia.
‡ Hibiscus rubra plenus.
§ Hibiscus rosa sinensis.
‖ Hibiscus flava plenus.

flesh-colour,* white,† and, last of all, but not least, the changeable ‡ one, which blows white, blushes into rose, and dies red. In the forests the red is often to be seen a good-sized tree.

There! pick a bunch of roses from that bush of the '*drap d'or*'—none can grow more luxuriantly anywhere than the drap d'or does here—and then come and dive down with me into a leafy hollow not far off. In our way, throw a passing look on that piece of still water reflecting the stiff *traveller's tree*§ and the graceful bamboo,‖ the branches of which overhang it. Those exquisite blue¶ cups, floating on the suface amidst their broad flat leaves, belong to a native of South Africa, where I have seen an acre of water at a time covered with them. The Leviathan** at their side is that 'monster' lily of Australia, that sent the botanical world into a frenzy of delight by flowering some years ago at Kew; an honour, I believe, it has never yet conferred on the garden at Pamplemoasses.

Before we go on, I must not forget to name one or two plants that, by rights, should have had an earlier place in my list.

One is the *manioc*,†† which I never recollect to have seen till I came here. It is extensively

* Hibiscus carnea plenus.
† Hibiscus lilifolia, a native of Mauritius.
‡ Hibiscus mutabilis.
§ Urania speciosa.
‖ Bambusa arundinacea.
¶ Nymphæa cærulea.
** Victoria regia.
†† Janipha manihot.

cultivated, being a great item in the food of the Malabars. Labourdonnais introduced it so far back as 1738, I believe, from South America.

From its nutritious root also comes the flour we call tapioca; but, strange to say, every other portion of the plant is deadly poison, indeed the flour has to be very carefully prepared before it loses its deleterious properties.

Our old friend *arrowroot*, but how different to the adulterated kind generally known in Europe, is here common enough. The root is the size of a small carrot, and something of its shape —quite white and scaly, the outer skin crisp, and looking like a fine polished shell.

One of the foreigners that have taken a permanent abode here, so that it is found growing wild everywhere, is the curiously-endowed *papaye* —papayer* gigantesque. The stem, like a huge cabbage stalk, often reaches to a height of twenty feet, on the top of which grow the leaves, which might pass for enormous specimens of our common English mallow. The fruit, in shape like a melon, has a cowslip-like flavour, peculiarly its own; it is pulpy, and brim full of black seeds. It takes about the same place here that blackberries do with us. We had one growing in at our window in our first garden, and I often picked a fruit for breakfast; but a little was enough. The leaves have two curious properties. If you

* Papaya macrocarpa.

hang tough meat under them it becomes quite tender, and if you crush them and rub your shoes with them, the polish obtained will rival 'Warren's jet.' No bird will touch the papaye fruit, which consequently falls, and rots unpicked upon the ground.

* * * * *

Well! here we are on the threshold of Mr ——'s sanctum sanctorum! What an eye-feast is spread out before us. Look! here is the smooth-leafed *caladium*, speckled or streaked of every hue; there the quaint prickly *begonia*, with its indescribably marbled tints, some as if a sheet of liquid chalk had been laid upon them. Close at hand the *aucubas*,* with variegated leaves, as beautiful as any of the whole vegetable world. Look here, at these slender stems, on which innumerable butterflies seem to be clustering. These are the orchideous treasures, and marvellously beautiful they are. Here is the famous *angræcum*,† described by Ellis, and at last introduced by him into England, where its fame had preceded it five and thirty years. Is not its spur quite singular, and, I should say, long enough to have given its specific name? Do not these exquisitely delicate white stars, running up each side of the branch, quiver and sparkle almost as diamonds on the golden wires of a diadem. Another variety, peculiar to Mauritius, I fancy, produces

* Aucuba japonica. † Angrœcum sesquipedale.

the 'tisane' so fashionable just now in Paris. Many a languishing beauty of the Faubourg St Germain, sips her '*fahame*,'* and drives away her 'migraine.'

Stoop down, and look into that running stream! Another floral wonder from Madagascar grows beneath its surface—the *water yam*, or lace plant,† more curious you will perhaps say than beautiful, and yet how fine its texture!—its veins closely resembling black lace. It looks like one of those anatomized skeleton leaves often to be found in young ladies' herbals. No part of the plant, but the insignificant flower on the tip of its needle-like stem, rises above the water. The root is farinaceous, and the natives of Madagascar eat it. When the plant is sick, the interstices are filled up, and it has the appearance of an ordinary living leaf. Its botanical name *ouvirandra* is derived from two Malagasy words—*ouvi*, yam; and *rano*, water.

One more flower I cannot help describing to you, *if I can*, and I close my account. It is exceedingly common, but I know none more beautiful. This is a large *cactus*,‡ which blows at night. Do not immediately say, 'Ah! the night-

* Angrœcum fragrans.

† Ouvirandra fenestralis. A puny specimen was exhibited in a small tub of water in the late International Horticultural Museum.

‡ Cereus (perhaps) grandiflora.

blowing cereus!' It is wholly different. In shape and size akin to that glorious crimson and purple one, a native, I think, of Mexico, but all know it well. It is seen in greenhouses all over England.

The one I am attempting to give an idea of is often found here climbing up into a tree twenty feet high; but it is far more usual to see it planted as a hedge or fence, as it is easily propagated, and of rapid growth. The delicacy of its colours is surpassed by none of any flower that I know.

When the heat of the day is over, it begins to open, and when fully expanded there is a 'corolla' before you of rare beauty. The petals are of a tinted white, with a profusion of gossamer fringe of the palest straw-colour, blending with the most exquisite sea-green. This, again, is shot, if I may so express it, with a vivid lilac. What a

'Cup for elves to creep into, and hide them there.'

It is out by hundreds of an evening in December. I have picked it when still closed, and put it into a glass of water to watch it expand. One morning, when scarcely yet daylight, I got up to look at it again; but it had already shut up, and faded, and was hanging languidly over the rim of the glass, as if it were too coy to brave the glare of day, as it is certainly too beautiful to last. Well, I hope my friends will like the garlands I have woven for them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NATURE'S SMILES AND FROWNS IN THE TROPICS.

About our climate. Take it all in all, we have one of the most enjoyable I have ever lived in. Nevertheless, Mauritius is a very trying place on first arrival, and one is apt to cry out despairingly for some time, and in rather a high key. I did so; but, as one gets acclimatised, it goes on improving, and although it is far from what one imagines to be perfection, it is as nearly so, probably, as any climate can be. In Port Louis nine months of the year are, to all but natives of the tropics, next to intolerable. The thermometer in my room, where office duties detain me daily from ten to four, is often at 93, scarcely ever under 82. I could not, I am certain, myself live all the year round in town; but up the country, at Moka for instance, where I reside, there is a great majority of days that are glorious.

Moka lies seven miles out of Port Louis, an ascent nearly the whole way to about 1000 feet above the level of the sea. The mornings are

cool, sometimes even cold, at least so I began to think after three years' residence. The nights are balmy and refreshing. When the moon hangs over the mountains, and the stars are glittering—they seem to be twice as numerous here as anywhere else,—the scene before you is one which even Jessica's 'night' could not have surpassed. Pre-eminent in one sense is the 'Southern Cross!' It is a constellation, in my opinion, that is greatly overrated. We may thank Dante for its undeserved reputation out of its own hemisphere. The stars that compose it are of unequal size, and lustre too, and are also crooked. I met lately with a description of it, which to my mind it well deserves; to wit, 'an irregular kite turned upside down, with only three respectable stars, and one very poor one sadly out of place.' But the twilights! They are brief, but beyond all imagination beautiful to the eye, as I have endeavoured already to describe them. Summer is perpetual. Few trees shed their leaves so completely all at once, as to be quite bare. One sort of brilliant plant rapidly succeeds the last. Many, I believe, flower twice or oftener in the twelve months. The palms are all the year round putting forth new branches, and as the young one unfolds itself to tower over the others, the underneath one of all fades, and soon falls. In short, here is

'A land you have not seen,
Where all the trees are ever green.'

I need scarcely remind you, reader, that you, in England, and I are now in the same predicament as 'Elia' and his correspondent. We have things, as they had, mutually, all upside down. Our longest days are your shortest. We *call* your summer our winter, although we never shiver, and you rarely burn. We are more than three hours in advance of you, so, as most people are up and out by daylight, we have done a good deal by the time your breakfast-bell is ringing. We scarcely, however, ever talk of summer and winter. We divide our year more properly into the 'hurricane,' or 'wet,' and the 'dry' season. For the first somewhat capricious visitor we are on the look-out from December to May. Up to this we are never quite sure he has passed us by for the current year. When he does come, as you may suppose, he is not welcomed very warmly. I believe, however, if there be not a healing quality on his wings, there is purification, which is but too often needed among such a population. February has the reputation of bringing most rain; and when we *get* it, we do not *for*-get it very readily. September is, in like manner, considered the driest month. Of very severe hurricanes, at least what are esteemed so here, but which, after all, must be mere jokes in comparison to those of the West Indies, I have

never seen one, and in all probability now never shall. The indications of their approach are tolerably to be relied on, although they often rush by at a distance, and we only know later, and selfishly rejoice, that they have vented their rage elsewhere. The barometer falls suddenly; the air is more than usually oppressive and sultry; the wind comes in strong gusts; for a minute or two everything is blown about most violently; and then, a momentary lull! The rain pours down in abrupt and heavy showers—deluge is the more appropriate word. But from all one hears, hurricanes in Mauritius have more of the lamb, and less of the lion, perhaps, than formerly.* In 1861 there was one that lasted six days, and, of course, the amount of mischief done was enormous; but, though of long duration, this hurricane was not really violent. It happened before our day.

As new comers, arriving, too, at the very commencement of the hurricane season, we were naturally on the 'qui vive' when we first heard that one was thought to be near. I was in town at my office. A warning came from the signal station. The vessels in port prepared themselves to 'brave,' if not the 'battle,' certainly the 'breeze.' I drove home immediately to avoid making a first acquaintance with my new friend on the high road, and also to receive so august a

* In 1731, a hurricane destroyed the public archives.

visitor as becomingly as I could in company with A——. I confess we rather looked forward to it as a grand sight of a new kind—a sensation, in short! We counted over our tins of preserved meats. We ascertained we could not starve; and we had duly worked ourselves up to a proper pitch of excitement, when we received a bit of paper from our neighbours. The black boy ran down the hill, dropped it, and away again as fast as his legs would take him. The message conveyed was laconic—two words: 'Shut up.'

Up I jumped! up A. jumped! In less than five minutes every door and every window, save one to peep through, was barred and bolted; the servants were dismissed to their huts; and A—— and I took up our reconnoitring position at the half-closed shutter.

We waited some time in anxious expectation. There was a loud growl or two now and then; an unwonted commotion among the trees—that was all! Suddenly, almost instantaneously, it became as dark as pitch. I must observe our house was in a small ravine—the bank it stood on sloping down to the river. For five minutes, or so, all was quiet again; then there came an unearthly noise, more like that of a discharge of heavy cannon than anything else, as if a broadside were raking the little valley at the end of which was our house. A shot seemed to have

struck us; our house, we almost fancied, was tottering, and about to fall. I daresay our overwrought nerves helped the delusion a little; but that one tremendous gust was, in all truth, an awful one. It gave me the first just idea of what the power of wind may be; and to my life's end I shall never forget it.

If one stared fixedly and long enough, one could detach the blacker shapes of the trees from the pitchy darkness in which the whole landscape was now wrapped. We could perceive that all at once they bent, every one of them, in the same direction; a crowd of giant mourners leaning forward over the same grave is a good illustration, but the silence of the grave was not here! the arrival of the despot was being clamorously proclaimed, and everything trembled, and bowed down, and crouched to the very earth before him.

'Now!' I exclaimed, 'it is coming.' But no! it came no more, at least with anything like the same violence. But that single instantaneous gust—how aptly called a 'coup de vent'—had been tremendous, as we learnt afterwards. It carried off, to a distance of some yards, a good sized iron building, just erected by a neighbour close to his sugar-mill. It shook the massive iron supports of the verandah of his own house out of their sockets, though they were solidly built into the wall, and bent them as if they were

made of paper. A number of panes of plate-glass were smashed, the shutter, or 'contre vent' having been by mistake left unclosed. Had another such blast followed no one can say what might not have yielded to its terrific force; but no after one was at all like it.

The next morning was almost bright. When we got up clouds were scudding fast over the still sulky-looking sky. Gleams of glaring sunshine broke out at intervals. Off and on a faint moan came up from the windy quarter, as if there were lamentation uttered too late for the havoc made and the ruin so widely spread. The ruthless spirits of the storm were still awake; that they had been up and stirring the night before was evident enough. The swollen river tore along half-way up the bank, and chafed over a good portion of our garden; limbs of trees lay scattered all about, in short, garden it could be called no longer—the shrubs had mostly disappeared. The creepers were coiled up in untidy heaps, like tangled ropes on an ill-kept ship's deck. Scarcely one banana that was not snapped short off at the lower part of the stem—the broad leaves, purple flowers, and clusters of fruit, all dabbled with mud, strewed the ground.

The look of the country, as I drove into town the following morning, was strange enough. The countless aloes growing all over this part of the

country—not the stiff American species—were broken short off, or drooping low; their flexible stems, if undestroyed, turned one and all the same way. They were like a vast crowd of idolaters bowing to their single invisible God with the most abject reverence!

During my second year the 'coup de vent,' although repeatedly announced as imminent, never came. But early this year, 1865, I witnessed another, in itself little enough, but accompanied by so disastrous an inundation that it will take many a year to heal the cruel scars it has left upon the face of nature. I purposely made notes of it while it was going on, and from them I now draw up the account, which it may be believed is vividly before me still.

On the 12th of February—Sunday—We were just getting ready to go to church, when the rain came on with sudden and great violence; the weather had been 'dirty,' as the sailors call it, for some time, and the glass had continued low, but I believe stationary; the rain rapidly turned into a tropical torrent. This was about ten o'clock in the forenoon. An occasional and distant wail told us the wind was getting up. Before long it blew with such force that we could be no longer in doubt what to call it. Everything that was unfastened banged about; everything, calling itself fastened, shook and rattled. Hinges and iron hooks seemed on the very point of being

torn away. Whew! what a gust! The two lofty trees before my sitting-room window prostrated themselves, then up again, and backwards with a corresponding violence. The rain was so thick that I could scarcely trace the outline of the mountain which rises straight before me. Every vestige of it vanished in another five minutes. The rapidly swelling river, getting broader and broader, roared and foamed, and tore along—the wind catching up the clouds of spray, mixed them up with the rain, and whirled them round and round in thick eddies. Suddenly there came a deafening noise, as if thousands of engines in a factory were all at work at once, and the big sound went on increasing!

The trees which grow on the banks, sank lower and lower, till the water boiled over them and swallowed them up to their very tips. Crash! and a huge mass of branches from a large tree, the leaves flying from it like sparks from the anvil of a smithy, danced by as if it were a twig, bounding along the ground, tearing up everything in its way, and cutting deep furrows in its course. I was standing at my open window and could see all this grand turmoil, which was but too palpably increasing every moment, within a few yards of me. The whole landscape, indistinctly seen through the mist, seemed to be every moment moving hurriedly by in one direction. I stared! I was bewildered, but fascinated

by the sight! Can this be reality? I said to myself. Volumes of rain that bore the aspect of solid masses; shattered branches, rubbish, sticks, stones, — once some poor birds, hurried irresistibly by, came and were gone! The noise was deafening. What a thought flashed across me! Is it thus the children of wrath will be dashed past the judgment-seat on the great day of reckoning?

Presently there was a pause—a cessation of all this howling and crashing, for which I know no proper epithet, and can give no adequate idea. It was an awful lull—the momentary stillness of the grave. Nature seemed beat, stupified, tottering—staggering under her tremendous chastisement, and yet one instinctively felt that a renewal of the same, perhaps even severer, was at hand. I understood, as I never had before, the full force of those words—'the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth.' And this, I was afterwards assured, as far as wind went, was 'nothing.' What must the something be!

Did not this 'nothing' come nearly up to Milton's words, in his magnificent hymn:—

'The aged earth aghast,
With terror at the blast,
Still from the surface to the centre shakes.'

I shall not easily forget a thicket of bamboos, which grows on the side of a long building close to my 'pavillon.' I am used to see them every morning as I dress, waving over the roof like feathers, the very picture of gentle grace. That morning they were tossed up and down with the fiercest vehemence, now utterly disappearing, now dashing up again. I thought of the vaunted policy of bending before a storm in order not to be broken. There certainly was a fit illustration of that wise counsel! How unceasingly did they rock backwards and forwards and twist and twirl for hours that day. They were like a troop of Bacchanals worked up to delirium in an orgie, and frantically flinging about their long, naked, skinny arms, and dishevelled hair.

Riveted, as it were, to the spot, I was watching them, when I heard a new noise—a tremendous wrenching and cracking of wood, and I turned quickly round. One of the solid square wooden pillars, supporting the verandah of a 'pavillon,' only a yard or two distant from my own, was dangling in the air. Another gust came, and it swung violently, then away, and presently it lay its length, some distance off, on the turf, as Goliath's spear might have done, when hurled in defiance at the 'stripling' David.

My turn next, I thought to myself; but my verandah, lucky for me, was just out of the direct line of the wind, and so I escaped.

Indeed I fared the best of all our little colony.

Such rain could scarcely fail to beat in through doors and windows anywhere. The carpenter's work here is never very close. But the 'great house' was in pitiful contrast to my more humble dwelling; the ceiling of the drawing-room streamed like the 'dropping well at Knaresbro.' Chairs, sofas, cushions, carpets, table covers, and everything on them, not hastily removed, were soaked. One element might have been gentle by comparison—wind; but certainly the other—water, seemed to make up for it.

The hurricane slackened towards evening; but about nine o'clock there came the greatest rush of water yet. About ten I threw myself down on my bed, fairly tired out. The river was still rising. In twelve hours it had increased well nigh twenty feet.

It would be impossible to describe the havoc which the morning brought to light. The kitchen garden, a large one, was verily a sad sight to behold; scarcely a vestige of its cultivation remained. It looked like a neglected swamp; deep holes and pools of water were to be seen all over it. In the flower garden, more out of the range of the hurricane, things were not quite so bad, but scarcely a plant had escaped. All were shattered or torn to pieces, some were uprooted and carried quite off. The movable roses had disappeared, tubs and all, whither, we have never known. The palms at the water's edge were no longer even slightly visible, as I had last seen

them. The river now ran some feet over them, though decreasing; the high bank proved this; it was sprinkled with innumerable dead fish, and the usually neatly-mowed turf was a bank of slimy mud.

Blessed is the climate where a rapid vegetation so soon obliterates such havoc, such ruin!

For twenty-four hours the road into town, either for carriage or horse, was impassable. On the Tuesday, —— and I drove in. What a scene! What destruction! What desolation! The bridges we had to pass were half carried away. Of many in other parts of the island not one stone remained on another; the parapets were mostly gone altogether, so that we had to get down and lead our horses; enormous fissures in the road; great holes gaping everywhere; masses of rock that had toppled over from the higher bank, or rolled down from the side of the mountains with all their crumbling beds of earth; through all this we had to twist about and to pick our way.

One thing had a very strange effect, the newly-laid Macadam had been washed clean off, carried two or three hundred yards down the slope, and was now spread out, as if purposely, all over the flat grass-land below. Branches snapped, dangling, and dripping, were to be seen everywhere, and lumps of straw and rubbish were lodged in those that still had force enough to support the weight. The water was rushing violently down each side of the road, and often across it in chan-

nels of its own cutting. It was enough to craze the Surveyor-General, and I believe it half did for a day or two.

But all this was nothing to the scene in town. There the great flood-gates had been opened about seven o'clock in the evening, at which hour a dam up above the town had yielded to the force of accumulated water, and burst; and down, without a moment's warning, poured death and destruction far and wide. I heard no end of stories of narrow escapes. People hastily saved themselves by swinging themselves up into the trees. Some scrambled out of their flooded rooms on to their roofs. Many had not time for flight, and were swept away, as the bodies afterwards picked up clearly proved. Many other poor fellows were out that night who never returned home, nor were ever heard of more. I was told of a hut with all its inmates being seen hurrying by with a fierce rush of water.

There was one particularly sad case of death. Poor young ——, whom I had met and laughed with a few days before, had been to dine in the country with the father of a girl he was reported to be engaged to. Rashly enough, poor fellow, he would drive home. In coming he had passed over the usual bridge, which, when he retraced his steps, was there no longer. The rain was coming down in torrents; the night was so dark he could not see a yard before him. Some said at the time that a voice hallooed to him to stop;

but if so, how should he hear it amidst that din of wind and water? He drove on into the boiling torrent—straight to his death without a pause. Master, man, and horse—the latter with part of the shaft still dangling to it—were picked up two or three days after. One other most distressing incident attended this poor young fellow's death. When the body was finally found it was stark naked, having been stripped of everything, not very far, as it turned out, from the spot where he had driven down. It had been thrown in again after being rifled, and the fierce stream had carried it further on to some considerable distance. The wretches who committed this brutal robbery were Malabars on Mr ——'s sugar estate, the camp of which was close to the river. The men have been tried and convicted. I have never heard to what extent they are to be punished. The sentence, probably, will be a lenient one if the timid —— had to prosecute. Nothing, I think, could well be too severe for so barbarous a business.

The stench in the town, not very far from my office, was for two days almost intolerable, and at one time getting to be serious. At last the Municipal authorities succeeded in having all the accumulated filth removed. The thoroughfare was closed. The heaps of abomination had been washed per force out of Creole houses into the middle of the street, but there they lay putrifying till fever threatened to appear, then they

were carried off. So far, so good! More than one hidden nest was rifled of its pestilential eggs before they could be hatched, and a cleansing unavoidably pressed upon several householders, which otherwise would never have been.

The loss of property was enormous. There was ruin all over the island, although the damage done in different parts was very unequal. In some scarcely more than the ordinary rain had fallen, and that unaccompanied by any over-strong wind. The shopkeepers in the chaussee—the principal street for business—came off the worst. Those, at least, who were situated at the point where the great rush of water came pouring over it. The mud that was dashed about caused even more destruction still. I saw heaps of silks and satins, and French gloves, and cunningly-wrought flowers, in pretty Madame ——'s shop, bespattered and utterly spoilt, although they had reposed on shelves above high-water mark, throughout the storm. I shall never forget watching a ground-floor store being emptied of its damaged sugar. The bags were passed from hand to hand, as buckets are at a fire in England, and looked like dripping half-inflated bladders. This store was under the Hotel ——. Into the upper storey a horse swam for shelter, and was found in the morning, when the waters had subsided, comfortably lodged in one of the sitting-rooms.

I went into a neighbouring 'Magasin de Meubles,' every morocco chair had its high-water mark upon it. The unopened line of railway suffered a good deal. The contractors have been enabled to inform us where to look for strong currents in after-floods, and the Government, perhaps, has chuckled over the amount of timely experience they have gained, at the cost of Messrs Brassey and Co.*

Mr ——, one of the contractors' staff, told me he found a piece of rock, some hundred yards from its original resting-place, which weighed at least eleven tons. This will give some idea of the force with which the water came down.

Nothing of the kind has been known for thirty years, and it will take as many more, I should say, to obliterate all vestiges of it, or before people will forget its disastrous effects.

Well! I began with a description of Nature's smiles. It will be thought, perhaps, I had better have confined myself to them. But what beautiful face will not sometimes put on an angry expression, or fail to wear an occasional frown; and if the painter is to pourtray the face quite faithfully, he must give it in all its moods, if he can.

* According to one report, the water came down for awhile at the rate of twenty miles an hour, and would have covered per minute an area of 1½ acre to a depth of four feet six inches.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE MOVE.

NEARLY a week at sea. Homeward-bound positively, else why this continued monotony of wide waters?

Our weather delicious—hottish in the middle of the day, but even then far from disagreeably so. The nights are divine, so bright, so soft. The sunset yesterday a glorious sight; the sky a deep crimson, and then the pale moon walked higher, silvering over the rippling surface of the waters more and more at every step, before the rosy blush of retiring day had quite left it.

We are a small party—that we might have been smaller still, by one at least, with advantage seems to be a question carried 'nem con.' I never knew a voyage yet without a black sheep! The —— are fellow-passengers, luckily for me.

Yesterday afternoon coasted along the 'Seychelles' Islands,* which I have heard conchologis-

* Up to 1742, when Labourdonnais caused them to be explored, these islands bore the name of the *Seven Brothers*. They are so called on the old Portuguese maps.

tically pronounced *sea shells* by more than one of my fellow-countrywomen in Mauritius. Close in shore at two. The pleasant sight of palm trees yet once again bending over, as if the reflection of their own graceful forms on the smooth mirror of the sea were given back to them, and that they loved to gaze at their plumy heads. I kept my eyes on them as long as I could—probably my last sight of them for ever.

Notwithstanding their ancient name of seven brothers, the 'Seychelles' are about thirty in number, some thousand miles north of Mauritius, and close to the Equator. The largest, 'Mahe,' owes its name to Governor Labourdonnais—'Mahe' was the family one of that ill-used man.

West of us lay 'Praslin,' remarkable for the eccentric species of palm called Coco de Mer.* The coco de mer is indigenous in no other known spot in the world but the Seychelles Islands, and, what is still more curious, in only two of them, 'Praslin' and 'Curieuse,' which are merely separated by an extremely narrow channel.

Nowhere else had it been found growing till planted by man's hand instead of God's.

Its ordinary height is from fifty to sixty feet, but it sometimes reaches one hundred. It is thirty years before it attains to its full growth, or bears fruit. The leaves are fan-shaped, twenty feet long, ten or twelve broad.

* Lodoicea Seychellarum.—Vide Appendix.

The nut, when in its husk, is far larger than the common cocoa, and has the appearance of two growing into each other, as you will sometimes see a large double hazel nut. On opening one, I found a sort of jelly, colourless and of a most disagreeable flavour.

Like all others of its family, this tree is put to every possible use. Among other things made from it are the most beautiful little baskets, diminishing one within another till they are almost too small to be opened even by the nimblest fingers; handiwork, I was told, of the poor imprisoned inmates of the convents.

Nuns, I fear, have oftener light fingers than light hearts!

But the marvel of this unique tree lies in the stem. The end of it, just above the level of the ground, is globular, and rests within a perfectly circular cup. The roots of the tree are attached to this cup, pass through it, and join the stem in long stringlike radiatory fibres. The elasticity of these roots permit the stem of the tree to oscillate to a certain extent in every direction, as a regular ball and socket joint. This marvellous arrangement peculiarly fits it for its habitation—the sea of a tropical climate—as it allows it to accommodate itself both to the oscillation of the waves and the blast of the hurricane. It has also been observed, that whenever the tree is placed on steep sloping ground, it permits the stem to

grow perfectly vertical, whilst the cup and roots follow the inclination of the soil.

For many years all that was known of this peculiar production of the Seychelles Islands was an occasional nut which sailors found floating in the husk on distant seas. Hence it was set down as some marine production, and received the specific name of 'Coco de Mer'—Sea Coco—which it deserves no better than any other of the many hundred varieties, although it has always preserved it.

Fairly in the Red Sea!

Burnt children dread the fire; on the same principle, those nearly *roasted* may do the same.

I remembered my voyage *down*, and trembled at the mere thought of the voyage *up*.

I have never said, I think, how nearly dead I arrived in Mauritius after that fearful heat. I, for a time, thought the old instrument cracked for ever; but by degrees it regained its tone, and kept it.

Now however I found that I had no reason to fear—such is the advantage of selecting the favourable season.

Our weather is delightful.

A complete state of 'dolce far niente,' with the awning up. I lie my length on a mat, and read 'Sensation.'

I have made acquaintance, at last, with the

Arch-Sensation writer, and can only say I shall cut her dead the instant I am off a voyage.

Left Aden in the afternoon of yesterday.

'O terque quaterque beatus,' he whose lot it is not to grow grey in Aden!

One would do better to sit down on a pile of hot cinders at once at home, and simmer one's life away! the effect the same—the trouble less!

The only one spot I know approaching to Aden in aridity is the Island of Ascension; but even Ascension has its green hill 'up the country,' and its one tree on the top of it. However, more than half a mile inland at Aden I never penetrated. I stepped ashore, walked to the post-office, and climbed up to Government House, or whatever it may be called.

The ——, whom I had known in Mauritius, had most kindly made me promise to 'look them up' on my way home. But *he* was already out, and Mrs —— not up, so I sat down, till the household should be more extensively stirring, on the broad stone gallery—one can scarcely call it a verandah. Presently came the never-failing attention in these parts—the matutinal cup of coffee—and then I was left to myself. I had plenty to observe, and plenty of time for it.

Government House from the front overlooks a contracted burnt-up amphitheatre of sand, bordered by the sea, and backed by crumbling hillocks, seemingly all tossed about together at

random. On these by comparison few showers have fallen since their formation.

Mrs ——, who has been resident several years, told me she had never seen rain, such as she could call a *bonâ fide* shower, but once!

Luckily, children do not require the watering-pot, or they would never reach man's stature in Aden!

Two camels were just below me, their legs bent under them, their heads erect, slowly turning now on one side, now on the other, as if set on a pivot. From the full round dark eye there flashed from time to time an inquiring glance. Thus they knelt and ruminated, and sniffed the fresh morning air. A cock was crowing vigorously in a genuine European farm-yard key. If I shut my eyes I felt nearer home in an instant. A gazelle, one of Mrs ——'s pets, frisked on a terrace a few feet below. Close overhead wheeled round and round three hawks. I could distinctly see the expression of the bird's eye, bent, rather more than comfortably for him, in the direction of the cock's dwelling, I thought.

An extremely lanky black biped was toiling up the rocky steep with a basket balanced on a very curious head. It looked like a bright ochre mop. They have a strange fashion here of daubing their *wool* with orange-coloured clay. As the man twisted and twirled along the zigzag path, he looked like a great black caterpillar wriggling

and writhing. Down, quite at the bottom, along the curving road by the shore, were riding an officer and a lady, both of them, doubtless, like the camels, drinking in, while they could, the refreshing draught of early day. They did not however seem to be ruminating.

Such were the only visible signs of life close at hand. I did hear distant sounds, whether human or not I could not pretend to guess.

The whole scenery was drowsy. Aden seemed bored with its dull stupid self.

Off the shore things were somewhat more lively. Our steamer was coaling; smutty barges were crowding round her. She looked like a great big black duck in the midst of her ducklings. A small boat or two scudded across the oil-like water; a white sail up, and a gay little pendant at the mast-head. A buoy, painted red, bobbed about languidly in the centre of a host of circles widening on the surface as the boat shot by and disturbed the otherwise sluggish water. The buoy glared fiercer in the sun, as every minute the sun itself looked more and more like a red-hot cannon-ball.

I had looked about till I had pretty well taken note of everything on this side, so I got up and strolled behind.

Considerable works were going on—barracks, I was told. God help the soldiers who are to be in them!

Workmen and work pretty well of one colour. Everything out o' doors in Aden is dusty. A group near took me insensibly back to the Bible. There was something so primitive and Eastern about it.

Two sleek plump little bulls, with humps on their backs, were gingerly turning out their toes as they stepped round the edge of a circular trough. Into this were pitched hard white blocks, which were soon crushed into powder for cement. The revolving stone had a roughly-cut beam piercing its centre, of which an awkward sort of wooden peg threaded the eye, and kept the beam in its place, although unsteadily. The beautifully-limbed little bulls had a look of humiliation. It was ignoble labour for such as they, but like all thorough-bred beings, being called to do it, they did it superiorly.

A scarecrow of a man at their side gave an occasional poke, but more than this he never seemed to venture to use the long bamboo wand, which rested on his shoulder the greater part of the time.

I went to the edge and looked towards the sea, on the other side of 'Steamer Point.'

All the same hue, with the exception of one or two green splotches just below—mere dots—planted by the broken-hearted, and one might almost fancy watered by their tears. The tidily-kept little cemetery told that Englishmen were near.

Back to Government House, a bath, and a capital breakfast after it. My fellow-passengers had come up, and we were a merry party.

How pleasant these brief impromptu visits are! Everybody is enchanted with everybody. The 'right side' is always kept 'upwards.' Nothing is unpacked too deeply. No time is given to open further and discover flaws and cracks.

I saw no more of the far-famed *tanks* than photographs of them on Mrs ——'s table. These enormous reservoirs were discovered a few years back, and their origin, I believe, is still as deeply buried in uncertainty as they were till recently in sand.

Happy for the Adenites if they are ever full!

Cairo.—El Kahira—City of Victory.

I have time for a hurried note or two. We slept at Suez. The principal impression left upon my mind of Suez is that of having paid five shillings for three small cans of water! I could better have understood it at Aden.

Got up early to take a peep at the *fresh-water* canal, on which boats ply already. The locks at the sea end are nearly finished. A gang of unmistakable workmen. I recognized the dear old conical hat and discoloured ribbons. 'Ma siete Italiani?' 'Si Signore!' and the well-known smile to greet you.

The greater work, hard by, which at a future day is to make the Mediterranean and the Red

Sea one, and England and France, perhaps, two, is looked upon by some as uncertain of success. The silting nature of the soil through which the channel is cut is held by them to be an insurmountable obstacle.

But a word of what I am now looking out upon, as I lean 'jotting down' by the open window in the great room of Sheppard's Hotel in Cairo—a spot, I imagine, which, in the world, has few parallels in the way of utter contrasts. Here is a periodically continuous succession of boisterous life and of stagnation dull as ditch water: the intervening days, uproarious as the troubled sea, when the two great waves of the 'homeward' and the 'outward-bound,' the ebb and flow of the 'overland route,' meet and break together over it.

From my elevated look-out I at this moment have a bird's-eye view of a very queer assemblage. There is something to my eye always peculiar in the generality of people who have been long resident in India. A would-be-air-of-importance, a well-to-do-uppishness, and self-implied superiority, which give a good deal of 'aplomb,' but unpleasantly too.

They are, in short, as a class, as bumptious as baronets are reputed to be. That single word would have done, without any other. There is also a certainty of the tongue's infallibility when pronouncing the names and provinces of their

adopted country. Ears not erudite accept such pronunciation as correct, but nevertheless it has often a ludicrous sound to other ears than the speaker's own. The out-going and home-coming are easily distinguished, if only by the outward man. The fresh stamp of the out-fitter is strongly on the young gentlemen. Leather pouches swung over the shoulder have still their shop polish on, and the 'pugri' is too nicely folded round the hat, and displays an immaculate untravelled purity, instead of the tawny hue and starched transparency, that bespeak long exposure under an Indian sky.

As to the ladies, the out-going have a newer cut about them. Petticoats fresh from Europe rustle triumphantly as they brush by the less orthodox homeward-bound. The Presidencies have their marked distinctions already. Bombay sits away from Madras, and Vice-Regal Calcutta is condescending to both, but familiar with neither.

It is highly amusing to a citizen of the world, independent of all three, to watch them, particularly if, as is now the case with me, there is a little knot of intimate acquaintances of one's own, in the midst of whom refuge may be taken from supercilious glances and reciprocal depreciating nods.

A large party are just setting out sight-seeing. There are incipient attentions and budding familiarities, which may or may not ripen into less

doubtful relations before the man at the mast-head declares 'Point de Galle' in sight.

Away they go, amidst screams for 'backshish' from bare-legged bystanders, with flies sticking all over their faces, and shrieks of laughter from the younger ladies. One is all but kicked off her donkey, the result of the first whack dealt by the urchin, who runs at her side; but she cries out, 'How awfully jolly,' and the lemon-coloured whiskered cavalier tells her she is 'awfully plucky.' Every one seems in a high state of delightful excitement, save the poor belaboured donkeys. One gentleman's legs are so long that he seems to be riding on a velocipede. This jovial party has unsettled me. I must go out in quest of adventure too.

At sea again!

'Merrily goes the bark, before the gale she bounds;
So darts the dolphin from the shark, and the deer before the hounds.'

We have no gale; and sharks and dolphins, if there be any, are invisible; but we are speeding along—the blue Mediterranean lighted up by a starlight night, and the wake of the steamer like the tail of a comet.

I shall not forget my two glimpses at Cairo. How full of interest—the unpaved, ankle-deep sandy streets, the tortuous bazaars, the odd nooks and corners picturesque in their very dirt; now a marble mosque, or a palace of the Pacha; now a

mud wall, with a dark date-tree sadly looking over it. Now one runs up against an Arab merchant, a mass of gold embroidery and bright silks; here one has to jump aside out of the way of a Coptic lady, a ball of black satin perched on the top of a donkey with her knees in her face, and veiled up to her stained eyes with the *Yashmach;* there you are nearly knocked down by the swinging wares of an itinerant shop. On my way up to the citadel I met one party curiously oriental. This was a bride in the act of being conducted to the bridegroom's house. She was quite covered with a thick and ample drapery. On the tip-top of her head was stuck a sort of tiara of crimson velvet, covered profusely with, I conclude false, jewels. She was necessarily supported, being unable to see her way, and reeled about from side to side as if she were drunk. Companions at each arm held her up and jostled her on — wise or foolish virgins or both, who were crying out she was 'coming.' Musicians making the most discordant noise with brass cymbals went before, headed by a boy of six or seven years old, quite a young oriental 'swell,' seated on a richly-caparisoned horse, which was led by two handsomely-dressed young men. This boy was the son of the lady's new husband, deputed to conduct his new mamma to her new home.

How that single word Egypt brings back a host of biblical associations! the studies of our

boyhood! the book with pictures resting on our mother's knee! Pharaoh's daughter with her maidens at the river-side, on which floats the little Moses in his bull-rush bed; Miriam standing aloof and keeping loving watch! And when I stood on the top of the citadel with that marvellous view before me, what a confusion of thought it was!

That 'wide, wide world' of plain; those pyramids, with their no longer esoteric hieroglyphics—the counterpart of whose painted figures I had met five minutes before in living beings—the men to this day cut their hair in the same fashion as once did the now dead of thousands of years back!

And last, not least, the Nile; pursuing, as then, its course of three thousand miles, and flowing on before my very eyes as on it flowed when Israel said, 'It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive, I will go down and see him before I die.'

I could imagine I had slept for centuries instead of an hour or two, between Cairo and Alexandria, when I woke and found myself in the last town. So ancient the physiognomy of Cairo! So modern the face of Alexandria!

We left Cairo with two hours of daylight before us, sufficient for us to see the rapid effects of the late but now almost wholly subsided rising of

the Nile. Here and there dark patches of the fertilizing slime lay about still; but the country, generally, round about was smiling in all its fresh verdure. Men were digging and sowing with the stars out above them, losing no precious time. As we puffed and whisked by, they and their mud villages looked like silhouettes against the sky.

Alexandria, save a suburb, is a modern Italian town. Take away Cleopatra's Needle, Pompey's Pillar, a grove of date trees, and an occasional group in the streets, and you might fancy yourself in its Piedmontese namesake. In the morning I chattered Italian with my barber, and eat sorbetti in the evening.

We have left Malta some hours. On my first visit when I was a boy I performed quarantine for the plague; this time for the cholera!

Up early, sleepless, restless, thoughts of home crowding on me as arrival gets nearer. Close off Corsica, in the twilight. Saw the buildings which compose the old nest of the biggest bird of prey that ever yet has been hatched.

Beating about the gulf of Lyons—too early to run in; but there *is* Marseilles. My heart thumps —my foot already seems springing ashore!

APPENDIX.

LODOICEA SEYCHELLARUM.

THE following particulars of this curious tree are extracted from a MS. account of it, drawn up by Monsieur de Quincy, who was governor of the Island in 1803.

'Cet arbre singulier ne se trouve dans le monde connu que dans les seules Isles de *Praslin*, et de *Curieuse*, situées dans l'Archipel des Isles Seychelles. Ces deux Isles n'étant séparées l'une de l'autre que par un petit canal d'environ 300 toises, sont à la distance de six lieues de l'Isle Mahé la principale de cet Archipel.

'Le *Cocotier de Mer* (Lodoicea Seychellarum—Labillardière) est de la famille des Palmiers où Lataniers, mais d'une espèce particulière. L'arbre qui porte les fleurs mâles ne produit point de fruit. Le Cocotier de Mer est la plus grande espèce des Lataniers connue, ayant en grand la forme et toutes les propriétés Latanières des Isles et de l'Inde, et quelques propriétés davantage particulières.

* * * *

'Les premiers que l'on avait vus, avaient été trouvés par les navigateurs flottants sur la mer du côté des Isles Maldives, où les torrents à l'époque des pluies à l'Isle Praslin et à Curieuse, et les courants de la mer, en avaient transportés. Comme l'on ne connaissait alors aucun pays qui produisit un semblable coco, on presumait que c'était une production maritime ainsi que M. Dalmour de —— le cite dans la 1e Ed. de son Dictre d' He Natlle.

'Le tronc de cet arbre s'éleve communément de 50 à 60 pieds—quelquefois à 80 où 100.

'La grosseur à peu près 12 pouces de diamètre jusqu'au sommet. La touffe d'environ 12 à 22 feuilles—point de branches—la feuille très grande formant l'evantail à 20 pieds longueur sur 10 où 12 de largeur.

'Le bois est dur, mais moins en rapprochant de son centre. Là c'est un composé Molasse de longues fibres—l'écorce est extrêmement mince.

'Le cocotier de mer mâle produit des fleurs qui fertilisent celles de la femelle—elles sont longues—de couleur pourpre, où violet. Elle est parsemée, à des distances égales, de petites fleurs jaunes faisant le plus bel effet. La longueur de la fleur est de 2 à 3 pieds, et la grosseur dans la partie la plus forte d'environ 6 pouces de circonférence.

'L'arbre est très long dans sa croissance 20 où 30 années avant que de rapporter du fruit, qui

est plus d'un an à acquérir sa parfaite maturité. Ils restent quelquesfois sur l'arbre trois ans avant que de tomber par terre. Chaque arbre en porte 20 à 30, qui pèsent 20 à 25 livres.'

A WORD AT PARTING!

FARE you well, staunch friend! upright colleague! constant and faithful associate of three years! companion of many a journey! my prop in many a need, my stay in many a strait, my guide through difficulties, a coadjutor to trust, a staff to lean on!

Ever from the first moment of our acquaintance have you moved steadily at my side! Never have I sought you, that you were not at hand, strong and steady!

Good-bye, then, you true child of nature—rough, but polished!

Whatever my own mood, sad or gay, there you were to meet the hand held out; to linger within its grasp, or to slip away from it without obtrusive remark!

How many another false step might I have made on life's uneven path, but for you! How often should I have tottered here, ay, and fallen, too, along a road beset with briars—so new, so tangled, and so crooked—but for you!

Sooner shall my right hand forget her cunning than our companionship.

How often have we sallied forth to wander together through scenes of beauty! How often, and how briskly, have we jointly trudged along our path! How frequently have we paused to rest side by side! How many a time have we mutually measured our lengths on Mother Earth—I weary, footsore; you untired as ever, when still you could be of use! Have we not climbed together the rugged steep, dived into the green valley, crossed the tangled wilderness, forded the brawling river!

What difficulty ever stopped you, if I were by to stretch out my hand and seek your aid?

And must we part! Shall I leave you behind, to return to your sunny sky, to your native wilds, the leafy enchantment you are familiar with since the very hour of your birth!

Son of the cold North, I turn my face to chillier climes, and to shores 'far away'! Let me have hold of you, then, once more! Let me again clasp you tightly while I can; and when, at last, I am forced to withdraw the hand well

known to you, to relax the familiar grasp, I will say, again and again — Fare you well, tried friend, heart of oak, my stout, my strong, my sturdy

WALKING STICK !

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